

THE YOUNG ELIZABETH

The Young Elizabeth

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I

Midnight in Hampton Court

‘Wake up! Wake up! The time has come now.’

The girl in the bed opened her eyes and stared at the woman who was bending over her. For a few seconds, half dazed by sleep, she could not remember where she was. This was a strange bed—a bigger, grander bed than the one she used in the nursery at Hunsdon; but the lady who was bending over her was her governess, Margaret, Lady Bryan.

She heard a voice in the room saying: 'The Lady Elizabeth should be made ready now. It will never do if she is late. This is a chance to win back her father's affection.'

Lady Bryan had turned from the bed. 'Hush! You talk too much.' Then she was looking down at the girl again. 'Come along, my lady. You are no longer at Hunsdon, you know. You are in the Palace at Hampton Court and there is little time to prepare you for the ceremony.'

The Princess Elizabeth sat up in bed, no longer sleepy. She put her head on one side and regarded her governess. She was a bright-eyed girl, with red hair, inclined to be of gingery tinge; her light blue eyes were alert, although her fair eyelashes and brows gave her a look of surprise. It would have been difficult for anyone to guess that she was only four years old, because she looked much older. But no one would need to guess. All those who saw her remembered very well the day on which the Princess Elizabeth had been born.

She leaped out of bed, and Lady Bryan wrapped a robe about her. Elizabeth gazed round the room, which was large; and the candlelight threw shadows on the panelled walls. Through the windows she could see nothing, although when she had gone to bed she had glimpsed through them gardens, green banks and the river flowing by.

Now it was night. Midnight. And she was being roused from her bed because this was a special occasion. This was the most exciting thing that had happened to her—or that she remembered happening to her.

Everyone, Elizabeth often thought resentfully, seems to know more about me than I do myself.

That was annoying, but it was something she was trying to change. It meant keeping her eyes and ears open, for

she had quickly learned that it was no use *asking* people why she, the King's daughter, had to live far away from the Court, why she never had enough gowns or petticoats to wear. She grew quickly out of them, it was true; but it was strange that the King's daughter should never seem to have decent clothes to wear.

Oh yes, there was indeed a big mystery surrounding her, and one day she was going to find out what it was all about.

'His Majesty will be very pleased to see *me*,' declared Elizabeth, but there was a faint tremor in her voice and she spoke out of bravado. She was wise enough to remind herself that if the King had wanted to see her during her short lifetime, he could have done so; and she knew for certain that he had not come near her for months.

'That is what we shall hope,' said Lady Bryan. 'Now stand still.' She signed to one of the servants. 'Now, woman, hand me the Lady Elizabeth's forsmock.'

Elizabeth's chemise was passed to Lady Bryan who slipped it over the Princess's head.

'I think I remember my father,' went on Elizabeth. 'He is very big and his hair is the same colour as mine. His cheeks shake when he laughs and when he is angry. Everybody is afraid of him.'

Lady Bryan was nodding as though she thought that a good description of the King.

'The Princess's kirtle,' she demanded of the servant.

'But *I* shall not be afraid!' declared Elizabeth boastfully. She was inclined to boast. Lady Bryan was continually telling her so. But when you are a little unsure of yourself, it sometimes helps to pretend you are very bold, thought Elizabeth.

'No, do not be afraid of him,' said Lady Bryan, 'but be very careful not to make him angry.'

'I think he loves me, really,' mused Elizabeth. 'I think he once carried me in his arms and kissed me. His beard tickled me and I laughed.'

'You couldn't possibly remember,' declared Lady Bryan.

'I could! I could! And there was a lady there. She was very beautiful.' Elizabeth's heart had begun to beat faster and she was watching her governess intently. 'She was my mother,' she added quickly.

Lady Bryan caught her breath and said: 'Enough of this chatter. Soon it will be time for us to go down to the chapel. See what a beautiful gown you have for the christening! Oh, my Princess, perhaps this is the beginning of a new life for us all.'

Elizabeth was thoughtful. Then she said: 'The little Prince is my brother, you know. There is to be all this fuss for him. Was there such a fuss at *my* christening?'

'There is no time to talk of such things,' Lady Bryan retorted; and she turned away quickly. Elizabeth knew why. She knew that when she had been born there had been a christening as grand as that which was now being prepared for her brother, Prince Edward, for at that time Elizabeth had not been in disgrace with her father.

It was something to do with her mother, she knew, her beautiful mother who was now dead; for the mother of her brother Edward was her stepmother, Queen Jane.

Queen Jane Seymour. That was Edward's mother. Elizabeth's mother had been Queen Anne Boleyn.

Lady Bryan was putting an ermine cloak about Elizabeth's shoulders, and for a moment Elizabeth forgot everything but the excitement of wearing it. She loved fine clothes and, for as long as she could remember, she had never had enough of those which were not even fine.

She strutted across to the mirror and tried to see herself by the light of the candles in the polished metal.

She heard Lady Bryan murmur: 'He can't help but love her. She's the image of himself.' And she knew that her governess was referring to the King.

There was a knock at the door and Lady Bryan signed to one of the servants to go and see who was there. A man entered; he looked tall and his doublet glittered with jewels. Elizabeth knew that he was important because Lady Bryan dropped him a very deep curtsy.

'The Lady Elizabeth—' he said, as though he were in a great hurry.

'She is here, my Lord Hertford.'

Elizabeth came forward and curtsied as Lady Bryan had taught her to. She did not want this courtier to think that she lacked Court manners merely because she had, for some strange reason as yet unknown to her, been banished from the Court.

'Ha!' She was lifted in a strong pair of arms, and shrewd eyes studied her. Elizabeth remained very still, her face on a level with the man's. She had made up her mind that she did not like him very much.

'So this is the Princess Elizabeth,' he went on. 'Well, my Lady Elizabeth, so you are to carry the chrisom for my nephew, ch?'

'For my brother,' she added. She had already heard that she was to have the honour of carrying the chrisom, the white robe which the Prince would wear for his baptism.

He laughed again. 'And that, my Princess, happens to be correct too. My nephew and your step-brother. The apple of His Majesty's eye.'

He put down Elizabeth—which pleased her—and turned to Lady Bryan.

'His Majesty is beside himself with joy,' he went on. 'A son at last. And to think that my little sister Jane is the mother of the heir to the throne!'

Lady Bryan looked a little sullen. She did not like the Seymours. She was a kinswoman of Queen Anne Boleyn, and one thing Elizabeth had discovered was that the Boleyns and the Seymours had some good reason for hating each other.

Elizabeth could never restrain herself. She cried: 'Shall I be allowed to hold my little brother?'

Lord Hertford laughed. 'I doubt that the precious heir to the throne would be entrusted to your arms, my child. But are you ready now? It is time we left.'

'Yes,' said Lady Bryan, 'the Princess is ready now.'

'Then come,' said Lord Hertford. He took Elizabeth's hand and she was a little alarmed to find that Lady Bryan did not accompany them.

The Palace of Hampton Court seemed an enormous place to the young Elizabeth. Every now and then she had to run to keep up with the long strides of the Earl of Hertford. Then suddenly he stopped and picked her up.

'This is quicker, I think,' he said.

Elizabeth was not very pleased; she stiffened in his arms. She felt it detracted from her dignity to have to be *carried*.

They had come into a long gallery lighted by torches, and here several people were standing about. They looked intently at the Earl of Hertford and the burden in his arms. Elizabeth heard her name whispered; and she felt glad, for she could never bear to be ignored. At least they knew who she was.

She was dazzled by the clothes of the people she saw.

She was fascinated by the gowns of the ladies, most of which were cut away in the front to show a richly embroidered underskirt and studded with jewels. The men's breeches were puffed and gathered and seemed to be made of the richest silks or of gold and silver cloth; in their doublets jewels glittered.

They were clearly waiting for the arrival of the King and baby Prince who was to be christened. Lord Hertford put Elizabeth down by the door of the chapel and then seemed to forget her. Elizabeth did not mind this now, for she could more easily listen to the chatter of these people, and they were more likely to talk freely if they forgot she was there.

They did forget for, after a while, she heard one of them say: 'Is it not shameful? Anne Boleyn's father is to take part in the ceremony! How he can bring himself to do it, I can't imagine.'

Elizabeth shrank further against the wall. It was an advantage to be so small among these grown-up people.

So her grandfather was to take part in the ceremony and it was shameful. Why? Perhaps if she listened intently she could find out.

'It's only a year ago that the King ordered the death of Queen Anne to make way for Queen Jane,' said another voice. 'Only a year. Who would believe it!'

Elizabeth felt as though her heart were leaping into her throat. So the King had ordered the death of her mother. She knew how people died when the King ordered that they should. They laid their heads upon a block of wood and the executioner's axe cut their heads from their bodies.

And that was what had happened to her mother. That was the shameful secret she had tried so hard to discover.

And here—before the entrance to the chapel in the gallery at Hampton Court she had learned this, just as she was expecting to join in the ceremony of christening the baby Prince.

Elizabeth clenched her fists together. 'I shall hate him,' she told herself. 'I shall hate the Queen. Now I know that it was because of her that my mother was sent to her death by my father.'

She heard a voice close to her saying: 'And who is this young lady?'

It was a very merry voice and it belonged to a merry-looking man. Elizabeth thought he was the handsomest man she had ever seen. He was very tall and his clothes were as splendid as those of any of the others, but they looked more so—perhaps because they were worn by such a handsome man.

He did not pick her up. He knelt, so that made him more her height, and he kissed her hand with the utmost seriousness.

'It is the Princess Elizabeth,' he said. 'Well met, my Lady Princess. I am delighted that you are honouring the ceremony with your presence.'

'It is fitting that I should do so,' said Elizabeth with dignity.

'Indeed yes.' He remained kneeling and that seemed to make them friends. 'Such a press of people!' he said. 'Such gossip! May I compliment you on your gown?'

'You may,' she answered; and he laughed as though he were very pleased.

'I should introduce myself.'

'Yes,' said Elizabeth, 'you should. Who are you?'

'Your most humble servant.'

'I meant your name?'

He put his face close to hers and whispered: 'Tom Seymour.'

'Tom Seymour! Then are you the Prince's uncle too?'

He nodded. 'But first,' he said, 'I am the humble servant of the Lady Elizabeth.'

Elizabeth was smiling. Although he was a Seymour she thought she could never be grateful enough to this man. He made her feel happy. She had been afraid that, when she had discovered what had happened to her mother, she

was going to burst into tears because it made her so unhappy. But this man had saved her from that disgrace. There was something so merry about him.

He said: 'Here comes the King. Here comes the heir to the throne.'

The people were crowded about her, and Elizabeth could see nothing at all until her companion lifted her in his arms, and then she could see everything.

She saw her father – bigger, it seemed, than anyone else, his face ruddy with excitement, the jewels glittering in his doublet and cape. And there was the baby, carried in the arms of a grand lady, the baby whom Elizabeth had made up her mind she could never love because of what the King had done to her mother for the sake of a son.

Then she was taken from the arms of that merry man by his brother the Earl of Hertford, and carried into the chapel. The white christening robe was put into her hands and she longed to throw it to the ground, because she wanted to have no part in the christening of this Prince.

She saw her grandfather who was carrying a wax taper, and he did not look at her. It was true, she knew, that he was ashamed to be here.

And there was the baby himself, wrapped in silk and lace which seemed almost to smother him, for only his little red wrinkled face was visible.

Elizabeth turned her eyes away from him.

'I hate him!' she whispered to herself, and she felt as though she were going to cry again. But then she saw the merry Tom Seymour smiling at her, and could not help but return his smile.

She listened to the chanting voices about her; the ceremony seemed to go on and on. Her lids began to press down over her eyes. After all it was midnight, and never before had she been awake at this time.

At last it was over—or so she thought. But she was mistaken. They were leaving the chapel, but that was not the end. Lord Hertford carried her and, as they went through the gallery and the great apartments, Elizabeth could not keep her eyes open. She slept. The sound of trumpets awakened her and when she opened her eyes it was to find herself in the Queen's bedchamber. She stared at the pale, sick lady in the bed. So this was Queen Jane, to marry whom Elizabeth's father had killed her mother. It was impossible to hate her, because she looked so ill. People were going to the bed and kissing her hands, and the King was standing by, legs apart, watching it all with such pleasure. Elizabeth saw that the lady in the bed was tired—even more tired than Elizabeth herself.

But even the strangeness of all this could not keep Elizabeth awake, and she fell asleep again. The next thing she remembered was that it was morning and Lady Bryan was standing by the bed telling her it was time to wake up.



Elizabeth knelt at the window looking over the river. Barges were constantly passing by and some drew up at the stairs on the bank, and their passengers alighted. There were many people hurrying in and out of the Palace.

In the ante-rooms courtiers whispered together; so did the serving men and women.

Something very important was happening in the Palace.

Lady Bryan, sighing, said to one of the women: 'We live in strange times. What will happen now, I wonder?'

'No need to wonder, my lady,' was the answer. 'The King will not be long without a wife.'

Elizabeth, who could not endure remaining in ignorance a minute longer, ran to Lady Bryan and grasping her skirt shook it. 'Where is Queen Jane?' she asked.

Lady Bryan lifted her in her arms and said gently: 'Queen Jane is dead. Poor lady, she gave the King his son, and in doing so she died.'

Elizabeth's eyes were round with wonder. So the poor lady, the poor, pale, tired Queen, whom she had seen in her bedchamber, was dead.

Elizabeth could feel nothing but pity for her. She was sorry she had hated her.

The great bell now began to toll. Elizabeth stood still, listening to it.

Then she said: 'The little Prince, like myself, has no mother now.'

'It is so,' answered Lady Bryan.

The bell went on tolling.

'I'll look after him,' announced Elizabeth. 'After all he *is* my brother.'

And from that moment she began to love Prince Edward.



2

A New Stepmother

On the day when the message came to Hatfield House there was great excitement. Elizabeth knew what it meant. It was a summons to go to Court, and only such a summons could make her governess, Mrs Katharine Ashley, who had taken Lady Bryan's place, so excited.

It was four years since Elizabeth had attended her brother's christening in the chapel at Hampton Court, and during those four years she had occasionally seen her little brother; she had also seen her father.

Edward was the most solemn little boy she had ever known. He was not very strong and, when she was with him, Elizabeth always wanted to look after him. He was very fond of her, far more so than he was of their elder sister, Princess Mary, who, being seventeen years older than Elizabeth, was now twenty-five years of age.

'Kat,' Elizabeth called imperiously to her governess, 'when do we leave?'

Kat held up her hands in astonishment. 'I do declare it is impossible to keep anything secret from you.'

'And why should you?' demanded Elizabeth. 'I am the mistress of this house.'

'Hark to her!' cried Kat Ashley, raising her eyes to the ceiling. 'Nothing misses those bright eyes – nor those little pink ears.'

It was much more fun having Katharine Ashley – Kat, as Elizabeth always called her – as governess in place of Lady Bryan. Kat was grown up but there were times when she seemed no older than Elizabeth. Elizabeth was fond of her, and she of her charge.

'I can scarcely wait to leave Hatfield House for the Court!' sighed Elizabeth.

'You'll never be a sober-sides like your sister Mary!' Kat told her.

'And would you want me to be?'

Kat studied her, lips pursed. 'I wouldn't want my Lady Elizabeth to be any way but what she is!' she announced tenderly.

Elizabeth sighed. 'Hatfield House seems like a prison to me, Kat.'

'It's a pleasant enough prison, my sweeting.'

Kat was right about that. Hatfield House was a palace, and the room in which they were now was lofty and noble. From the windows Elizabeth could see the beautiful

grounds. Here she lived like a Princess, but a Princess in exile. She longed to go to Court, to sit beside her father at the banquet. On the occasions when he had seen her, he had seemed to like her. She was bright and gay, which Mary never could be; she was healthy and full of vigour, which poor Edward could never be.

Once, when she was with her father, he had put his great hand, heavy with rings, on her red head, which was almost the same colour as his own, and had said: 'Why could you not have been born a boy, girl?'

That had made her heart beat fast. He would have been happy if she had been his heir. That was what he meant.

If only she had been born a boy, perhaps she would not be exiled to Hatfield House, nineteen miles from London.

'Kat,' Elizabeth demanded now, 'you must tell me all you know. I command that you should.'

'Hoity-toity!' Kat retorted, putting her hands on her hips. 'You may be the Princess, my love, but I am your governess. You would do well to remember that.'

'You would do well to remember that if I told certain people how you gossip with me, Mrs Kat Ashley would no longer be governess to the Princess Elizabeth.'

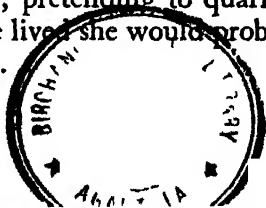
'And what if I told how ready you were to listen, how you plague me night and day to tell you this and that — what then, my lady?'

'You would be the one to lose your place.'

'Do not be too sure of that.'

They looked at each other in dismay. Then Kat Ashley burst out laughing and they rushed into each other's arms. For the fear that they might one day be separated was what alarmed them more than anything else.

They often joked together, pretending to quarrel; but each knew that as long as she lived she would probably be the best friend the other had.



'Now, Kat,' said Elizabeth, freeing herself from Kat's embrace, 'you must tell me all about it. Why are we to go to Court? Has the Queen at last prevailed upon my father to let me live there, as a Princess should?'

'Not so fast. Not so fast,' said Kat. 'The King is not to be persuaded just like that!' She snapped her fingers. Then she put her face close to Elizabeth's and whispered: 'He can't forget your mother. Perhaps you remind him of her.'

'I remind him of himself. Everybody says I resemble him more than her.'

'You're the living image, my love. When you stand there raging at me, stamping your foot—as you do far too often—I could believe it was His Majesty himself.'

Elizabeth laughed. She liked to be reminded that she was so like the King.

'Well,' she said impatiently, 'so Queen Anne has at last persuaded him. She promised me she would, and I knew she would keep her promise. The Queen is a kind lady, and it is a shame they laugh at her because she speaks English in such a strange way. Those who laugh at her could not, I dare swear, speak her native German.'

Kat was silent, and Elizabeth stamped her foot in anger.

'Now do not sit there, looking so wise, Kat Ashley. What do you know about this summons?'

'That a Queen may have persuaded him.'

'Well, that is what I said, did I not?'

'But not Anne of Cleves.'

'Then what Queen?'

'The new Queen.'

Elizabeth looked puzzled, and Kat laughed slyly. 'So I am the one who babbles too freely, am I! Yet, my lady has not yet heard that Anne of Cleves is no longer the wife of King Henry the Eighth of England.'

'No longer his Queen!' Elizabeth's blue-green eyes were wide with astonishment. 'Kat—what has happened to her?'

'Oh, she's safe enough. But the King did not like her as a wife.'

'She was not handsome enough, I suppose,' said Elizabeth. 'But she was good and kind.'

'She is good and kind. She's wise too; because, when the King said to her, "I no longer want to be your husband but I'll be your brother instead," she said, "Thank you, Your Majesty!" And she set out for the Palace at Richmond where she lives now, happier to be the King's sister than she was to be his wife.'

'How can she suddenly become his sister when she was his wife?'

'Ah, my love, these things can be arranged when a King such as Great Henry wishes them to be.'

'And the new Queen?'

'Her name is Catharine Howard, and she is young and the loveliest creature at Court, so I've heard. The King is happy and denies her nothing, and when she says: "It is sad that the little Elizabeth should live in exile at Hatfield, and I should like to see her at Court—" the King answers, "So be it."'

'Kat! This is true? You swear it?'

Kat placed her hand on her heart and said: 'I swear by my faith.' Then she was laughing. 'Catharine Howard is a cousin of your mother's. Naturally she would wish to see her cousin's daughter in her rightful position. Depend upon it, my love, everything is going to be different now.'

Elizabeth had often heard that everything was going to be different; and often it was—for a time; then the old pattern of life was resumed. Sometimes, it seemed, she was in favour with her father, sometimes not.

Kat was related to the Boleyns and therefore a distant kinswoman of Elizabeth herself; perhaps the new Queen would remember that, for she too must be distantly connected with Kat.

Elizabeth could think of nothing better than that she should go to Court and have Kat with her there. Kat would discover all the gossip and tell it to her mistress.

It had been wonderful since Kat had come to be with her. Kat had told her why the Princess Mary was resentful against her, Elizabeth; and that had helped her to come to an understanding with Mary. Mary felt towards Elizabeth as Elizabeth had once felt towards Edward. For Mary's mother, Queen Katharine of Aragon had been removed from the throne to make way for Anne Boleyn, even as Anne Boleyn had been removed to make way for Jane Seymour, although Mary's mother, being a powerful Spanish Princess, had not lost her head.

There was so much to learn about her family, and the more she knew, the more she felt able to understand what was best to be done.

'So it's away to the Court!' cried Elizabeth gaily and she leaped to her feet and held out her hand to Kat, who took it; and laughing together they danced what Kat had taught her was the newest Court dance.

As they rode their horses along the lanes to Hampton Court few people took notice of the Princess Elizabeth. Kat rode beside her, and other members of her household were behind and before them. Kat might have been a noblewoman riding to Court with her young daughter, perhaps to take part in the celebrations for the King's marriage to his new Queen.

Elizabeth felt a little hurt. She liked to be recognized as

the King's daughter; she was always hoping that someone would notice the resemblance and point it out.

At last they came to Hampton Court but they were received with little enthusiasm. The King, with a new young wife, would certainly not be very interested in the daughter of Anne Boleyn, and therefore no one else was.

When they were in the apartments which had been set aside for them, Elizabeth quickly took off her riding clothes and changed to the fine gown which she had been given, because of her coming to Court. She preened herself a little and Kat watched her with amusement.

'Oh, it looks fine enough,' said Kat, 'now that there's no one before whom to show off but Kat Ashley. But wait till you see the fine dresses and jewels of the new Queen and her ladies; then you may not be so pleased with yourself.'

Elizabeth ignored her. She was longing to see her brother who she knew was in the Palace, and she was watching for the opportunity to slip away. Edward was the heir to the throne and, as such, a very important person. If she wanted to see him she should first ask his permission to come; but Elizabeth snapped her fingers at such ceremony. He was her brother—her little brother—and she was not going to let him forget it, heir to the throne though he might be.

So, as soon as she was alone, she slipped out of the apartment and hurried to those which she knew were occupied by the Prince. The guards, who were always stationed outside his door, looked at her in surprise, but because she was only eight years old—and perhaps because she had such a look of her father—they did not stop her.

She went into the room and there, sitting in a window seat, was her little brother; and with him was Mrs Penn, his nurse whom he loved so dearly.

He looked so small and pale sitting there with plump, rosy-cheeked Mrs Penn; the room seemed enormous because he was so little. It was such a grand room with its hangings of gold and scarlet brocade and there was a rich carpet on the floor. The four-poster bed, with its carved and gilded ornaments and its velvet and brocade valance and counterpane, was suitable for a great Prince. It was so hard to remember that the puny little boy sitting in the window seat *was* a great Prince.

He saw her at once. 'Elizabeth!' he cried, and leaped from Mrs Penn's side to rush to his sister and throw himself into her arms.

Elizabeth knelt and kissed him. 'Why, Edward, I believe you have grown. And are you pleased to see me?'

'It seems so long,' said the little boy. 'I wish you lived here.'

'So do I,' Elizabeth told him. 'Perhaps one day I shall. You would like that, Edward?'

'I would like it more than anything else,' Edward told her; and then, because he was such a truthful little boy, he added: 'Almost more than anything else.'

Mrs Penn came forward and curtsied. Elizabeth smiled up at her. If she had not had her own dear Kat Ashley she would have envied Edward his Mrs Penn, for Edward's nurse loved him as devotedly as Elizabeth's governess loved her. It is as well, thought Elizabeth, that they do, for being the son and daughter of a King and having no mothers, it is fortunate that there is someone on whose affection we can each rely.

'Has my brother been well, Mrs Penn?' Elizabeth enquired.

'As well as we can hope, my lady. He is not strong enough to take all the exercise his father would like him to. I will not allow that.'

Elizabeth smiled. She believed that Mrs Penn would really face the wrath of the King rather than let her little charge run a risk of harming himself.

'But he does well with his lessons,' said Mrs Penn.

'I wish we could do lessons together, Elizabeth,' said Edward.

'Perhaps we shall one day.'

There was now a commotion at the door, which was suddenly flung open, and a pale woman came in. She looked angry, and Elizabeth scrambled to her feet. This was the Princess Mary.

'Elizabeth!' she demanded. 'What are you doing here?'

'Paying my respects to my brother, sister,' answered Elizabeth.

'In such a manner—it is unworthy of him—and of you!'

'I wanted to see him so much.'

The defiance faded from Elizabeth's voice. Poor Mary! she thought. She looks ill, and she is so unhappy. Her mother is dead, even as mine and Edward's are, but perhaps she hasn't a Kat or a Mrs Penn to love her. Indeed, Mary did look unloved; that was why Elizabeth suddenly forgot all ceremony and, running to her half-sister, put her arms about her and looked up into her face beseechingly.

'Mary,' she said, 'I am so happy to be with my brother and sister.'

Mary looked down at the flushed face, the brilliant hair and the bright bluish-green eyes. Poor child! she thought. Her lot is as bad as my own. And even Mary, a little soured by misfortune, never able to forget the sad loss of her mother, for whose sufferings she still blamed Elizabeth's mother, could not stand out against the charm of Elizabeth.

She smiled faintly. 'You should have waited until you were summoned to his presence,' she said a little gruffly.

'Don't scold Elizabeth,' pleaded Edward. 'I wanted her to come.'

At that moment someone else came into the room. This was a girl in her late teens, several years younger than Mary. Elizabeth stared at her, thinking her the loveliest girl she had ever seen. There was certainly no ceremony about her. She looked as though she were ready for a romp. Mary was looking at her with disapproval, but the eyes of Edward and Elizabeth were shining with delight.

'Don't tell me,' she said. 'You are Elizabeth. You are Edward, and you are Mary.'

Mary was horrified that she should address them in such a way but surprisingly she did not protest, and Elizabeth understood why when the girl went on: 'And I am **your** new stepmother.'

'The Queen!' exclaimed Elizabeth, and she went down on her knees before this radiant girl, who laughed and said: 'Please don't. Get up. I want to look at you. We're some sort of cousins, I believe. I did meet your mother once or twice. She was lovely. Oh – and you are a little like her.'

Mary said to Mrs Penn: 'Bring a chair for Her Majesty.'

'Oh no,' insisted Catharine Howard, 'I don't need a chair.'

Her eyes were on Elizabeth, and Elizabeth felt exultant. She knew that Queen Catharine was remembering her mother and their near relationship. She was certain that the new Queen would do everything possible, not only to have her brought back to Court, but to make it possible for her to live there permanently.

In the great banqueting hall, Elizabeth sat immediately opposite Queen Catharine, and the Queen was on the right

hand of the King. Never had Elizabeth seen her father so happy. It was true that he had few glances to bestow upon his daughter; they were all for his new Queen; but when he did look her way he had a smile for her.

Elizabeth had never seen such a banquet, such dancing, such masques. She had never had such fine clothes to wear. She wanted the fun and excitement to go on and on; and she dearly loved her new stepmother who, she knew, had made it all possible.

In spite of the gaiety of the banqueting hall, the mummers and morris dancers, the pageants and plays, Elizabeth could not keep her eyes from straying to the open timber roof with its arches in which there was a touch of gold. Kat had said: 'Do not look up at the roof, my child, for there are the badges of the King and your mother, and there you would see their initials entwined. So you must not let anyone see you looking, for they would be reminded, and the King would not wish to be reminded of Anne Boleyn at the celebration of his marriage to Catharine Howard.'

Yet Elizabeth could not keep her eyes from straying there. She saw the arms and badges of Jane Seymour, Edward's mother, and the small figures of angels and the beautifully engraved patterns. That roof excited her, but when she noticed that others had observed her interest she quickly looked away to the great mullioned windows and then to the dancers.

The Queen had leaned forward. 'You are pleased with our entertainment?' she asked.

'It is wonderful!' Elizabeth answered.

The King's attention was directed towards his daughter.

'Come here to us,' called Catharine. And Elizabeth, her heart beating wildly, went to the other side of the table to stand between the King and his Queen.

'Are you not proud of your daughter?' Catharine asked almost pertly, and Elizabeth trembled, for she had never heard anyone speak to the King in that carefree manner before.

Then an astonishing thing happened; a great arm was put around Elizabeth's waist and she was caught against that glittering doublet. King Henry put his face close to his daughter's and said, although he was still looking at the Queen as he spoke: 'I am not displeased with her.'

'Then, Henry, you will not send her back to Hatfield?'

'And why then should you wish her to be here?'

'We are already friends, are we not, Elizabeth?'

'Yes,' Elizabeth passionately declared. She turned to her father: 'Yes, Sire, I love the Queen.'

'Then,' said the King, 'my daughter and I think alike in at least one thing.'

'And you will allow her to stay?' asked Queen Catharine. 'I ask you, Henry, to please me. A wedding present.'

'You have had wedding presents in plenty,' he teased.

'This would please me more than any.'

The King laughed a low rumbling laugh. Then he lightly flicked Elizabeth's cheek with his hand. 'The Queen has spoken,' he said.

What a happy time followed! Elizabeth remained with the Court. She was often in her little brother's apartments and they took lessons together. He was very clever, but Elizabeth was far in advance of him and it was her pleasure to sit side by side with him and go through Latin exercises together. Then his pale face would become flushed with pleasure; and although it must be confessed that Elizabeth bullied him a little—but in the most affectionate way—he seemed to like this.

Queen Catharine came to see them with the King, and so merry was the Queen that very soon she would have them all dancing together—even the King; and Elizabeth felt that they were, after all, like any other happy family.

The Princess Mary was not so happy as Elizabeth and Edward. She was always afraid that she would lose some of the honours she had; and because Elizabeth was such a favourite with the new Queen, she feared that her young half-sister might be given precedence over herself.

Poor Mary! thought Elizabeth. If only she would laugh and be gay and lively! Then she would find more favour with our father.

At night Kat Ashley would creep into Elizabeth's bed and they would laugh together over their private jokes and make plans.

Kat said the wildest things. One night she said: 'Do you know, my love, you might be Queen of England one day.'

'I—Queen of England! But Edward is going to be King, and his son will be the next King.'

Kat was silent for a few seconds, then she said: 'He is not very strong.'

'Kat!' protested Elizabeth.

'I only say that, if he should not live long enough to be King and have a son—'

'My father and the Queen might have sons—or daughters. They would come before me.'

'There are some who say that the King will have no more children.'

'Oh,' murmured Elizabeth. 'But then there is Mary.'

Kat whispered: 'The Queen loves you better than she loves your sister Mary. What if she asked for special privileges for *you*? The King would do anything to please his Queen, so they say.'

'Kat, you say the maddest things.'

They were silent. But from that day Elizabeth often found herself thinking: If I were Queen—

Two happy years passed, and then one day Elizabeth was aware of a strange new atmosphere in the Palace. She was constantly coming across people who were clustered together in little groups, whispering.

The King and Queen had been away on a long journey together to the North, and they had returned to Windsor Castle and were now on their way to Hampton Court. There should have been the planning of great banquets and balls to celebrate their return, but instead there was this strange, brooding tension.

Something was wrong; Elizabeth knew it.

The King and Queen came to Hampton Court and all seemed merry for a while. But one day, when the King went to the chapel to give thanks for a safe return from his journeys, Thomas Cranmer, who was Archbishop of Canterbury, slipped a paper into his hand. When the King read this paper he was very angry, because it contained accusations about the behaviour of the Queen whom he loved so dearly.

The secret was out. Kat whispered that she pitied the poor Queen, and that it might be that the King would rid himself of her as he had rid himself of Elizabeth's own mother.

Elizabeth went to Richmond Palace, there to talk with her friend, Anne of Cleves, who was weeping for poor Catharine Howard.

'How happy I was,' she said, 'to cease to be the wife of the King and become his sister.'

'Tell me,' said Elizabeth, 'what has Queen Catharine

done? She is so kind and I do not believe she has ever harmed anyone.'

'She has loved others before the King, so they say.'

'But why should she not?' demanded Elizabeth.

'She has many enemies,' mourned Anne. 'It may be that they will persuade the King to destroy her.'

Those were sad days which followed. Elizabeth demanded to know all that Kat knew, and Kat told her the story in parts, so that Elizabeth had to fit it together. Poor Queen Catharine Howard had lived with her grandmother and she had been allowed to run wild in her childhood. She had made friends with people who were not considered suitable to have been on friendly terms with a King's wife. Some of these she had loved too well.

'But what will happen to her?' demanded Elizabeth.

No one could say.

The news came that the Queen was confined to certain rooms in the Palace, and the sound of her weeping could be heard coming from those apartments.

'How I wish we could help her!' said Elizabeth to Edward; and the little boy looked at her with wide, frightened eyes. Mary smiled coldly.

'If she is unfit to be the King's wife, it is well that he rid himself of her,' she said; and Elizabeth knew that Mary was thinking of her own mother, and in that moment she hated Mary.

She knew then that there would be occasions when she and Mary would be the bitterest enemies.

It was one sad day when she heard the sound of screams coming from the gallery which led to the chapel. Elizabeth had never heard such bitter crying in all her life. She believed that she would never forget it and that the gallery at Hampton Court would always in future be haunted for her by the lovely young Queen.

Kat took Elizabeth by the hand and hurried her into her apartment. She held her tightly against her.

'Why is the Queen crying there?' asked Elizabeth.

'She has escaped from her room and hopes to see the King, who is in the chapel. If she reached him she would implore him to forgive any sins she may have committed in the past, and he might well grant her that forgiveness, for it is said that she can still affect him deeply.'

'I am praying that she may reach him,' said Elizabeth.

Kat did not answer. She knew that Elizabeth's prayers could not help the Queen whose jailors had already dragged her back to her apartment.

It was a bleak February day and there was gloom in the Palace.

Elizabeth sat side by side with her brother, but she could not concentrate on their books.

She knew that down the river, on the green before the chapel of the Tower of London, the laughing young Queen whom she had loved was laying her head on the block in readiness for the executioner's axe.

Later they would bury her by the side of a Queen who had met a similar fate; and that Queen was Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's mother. Those two Queens would lie together in the chapel of St Peter ad Vincula.

Edward looked at her with puzzled eyes.

'Elizabeth,' he said, 'what will become of the Queen?'

She did not answer but, putting her arm about him, she asked herself instead: 'What will become of any of us in this strange world we live in?'



3

Elizabeth tells a Secret

During the next months Elizabeth made new friends at Court. She often visited the ex-Queen, Anne of Cleves, who was always delighted to see her; and it was a pleasure to visit her in the Palace of Richmond, because Anne seemed so happy. She could not help congratulating herself that she had been the King's wife yet still lived, and she was very gay in her Palace of Richmond.

Sir Thomas Seymour, whom Elizabeth had seen at Edward's christening, often talked with her. He always amused her; he would come to her apartment and joke with her and Kat; he teased them and played jokes on them, and they could never be sure what he would do next.

Kat looked forward to his visits as much as Elizabeth did, and they would plan together what tricks they could play on him to surprise him.

Another great friend was Lady Latimer, who was a widow; she had had two husbands, both of whom had been a great deal older than herself and to whom she had acted as nurse until they died. She was gentle and kind; and Elizabeth was very fond of her.

It was small wonder that, with such friends at Court, Elizabeth began to think that she need not worry about being sent into exile again.

She was unsure of her sister Mary who, she guessed, was a little jealous of her. But Edward loved her and she believed that even the King himself had a fondness for her. Sometimes she would catch his eye upon her and see his small mouth twitch as though she reminded him of something that amused him.

One day when she went along to Edward's apartments she found several other children there.

These were the two little girls—Lady Jane and Lady Catharine Grey. They were related to Elizabeth, because her grandfather, King Henry VII, was their great-grandfather. They were very pretty, particularly Jane, and she was Edward's greatest friend. They often came to the royal nursery and took lessons with the little Prince. Jane was even cleverer than Edward and there was nothing they liked better than to read Latin verse together and even compose it.

Elizabeth had demanded of Edward whom he loved best, his sister or his cousin Jane Grey; and Edward had stammered and grown red with discomfiture.

'I love you both so much,' he had said at last, 'that it is difficult to say.'

Elizabeth had scorned his attempt to deceive her.

'So you prefer her!' she said. 'I know why. It is because she is soft and gentle, and I am not. Very well, love her best if you must, but do not forget that she is only your cousin, while I am your sister. I am Princess Elizabeth, and she is only Lady Jane Grey.'

'Oh yes,' said Edward, eager to make the peace. He wanted peace all the time and he wished he did not feel so ill sometimes, because it made his father angry. He had seen him stomp through the apartments, threatening the doctors and Mrs Penn and everyone else with terrible punishment if anything should happen to his son and heir. Edward knew that his father was afraid he, Edward, would die, because he was the only son. It was a great responsibility, being the King's only son. He wished he was bold and full of health like Elizabeth. He admired Elizabeth almost more than anyone else, but she, who was so strong and never seemed afraid of anybody, could not understand him as Jane Grey did.

As Elizabeth came in she thought how sick Edward looked, and immediately she remembered Kat Ashley's words. 'One day you might be Queen.' She tried not to remember them but they would keep coming back.

And so, as she entered the room, she did so like a Queen. Jane and Catharine curtsied to her. She had insisted that they do this and, as she ruled the nursery, they obeyed.

Then she turned her attention to the newcomers. They were two boys, and the elder was about her own age. He was dark and tall—quite the handsomest and the boldest boy she had ever seen.

She approached Edward, took his hand and kissing it said: 'How are you, brother?' She should have knelt, of course, but she did not care to do so under the bold eyes of the boy who watched her. Edward would forgive her any little breach of etiquette, she knew.

'I am well, sister,' answered Edward, who always said he was well however ill he felt.

'And who are you?' Elizabeth demanded of the tall boy.

'My name is Robert Dudley,' he answered.

'I am the Princess Elizabeth, the King's daughter, and you must say "Your Grace" when you speak to me,' she told him haughtily, for she thought he was staring at her much too boldly. 'I do not know a Robert Dudley nor what he is doing here.'

'You know him now,' said Robert coolly, as though he were not in the least impressed by the fact that she was the King's daughter. 'And he is here to share the company of His Highness Prince Edward.'

'It may be that I do not wish to know him,' she said, turning away, angry because he had not called her 'Your Grace'. She went to Edward and taking his arm led him away. 'Who is this Robert Dudley?' she asked.

'His father is Lord Lisle, a high official at our father's Court,' whispered Edward. 'Robert and Guildford have come to play with us. Robert is very good at inventing games.'

'It is a pity he has not learned better manners,' said Elizabeth.

'We must talk to them,' protested Edward. 'They are our guests.'

'Edward, you are the heir to the throne. You do not have to talk to anyone you do not wish to talk to.'

'But I do wish to talk to Robert and Guildford,' said Edward almost tearfully. 'And to Jane and Catharine.'

'Oh, come then,' said Elizabeth, 'we will talk to them, and if we do not like their ill manners we will request that they do not trouble us again.'

'I am afraid they will think *us* ill-mannered,' said Edward.

'Edward! You forget. We are the Prince and Princess.' But she was looking over his shoulder and she saw, to her satisfaction, that Robert Dudley was glowering at her. 'What games can you play, Robert Dudley?' she demanded.

'I no longer play children's games,' he told her. 'I am grown up.'

'How old are you?'

'I am eleven. And you?'

Elizabeth was not going to tell him that she was a year younger than he was. That would be too humiliating.

'Robert rides to the hunt like a man,' piped up young Guildford.

Elizabeth ignored him. She could well believe that Robert excelled at all sports such as riding, archery and tennis. She doubted whether he was as good at his lessons.

So she said: 'We will make poetry. Each of us adding a line. That is a good game.'

Robert shrugged his shoulders, and they sat in a circle and played this game. Elizabeth, Jane and Edward were very good at it. Robert was very bad; as for Guildford, he was even worse.

But Robert spoilt their triumph by saying it was a game for girls and scholars. It was no man's game and he was glad he could not think of rhymes.

Elizabeth was about to protest when one of Edward's attendants came in to announce that Sir Thomas Seymour and Lady Latimer had called to see him.

Edward sprang up with pleasure. He was very fond of Lady Latimer, and Thomas was his favourite uncle. Elizabeth was also pleased, but she was not going to show her feelings as readily as Edward did, particularly with Robert Dudley looking on.

'Here's a merry party!' cried Thomas, bursting in on them; his blue eyes were almost lost in wrinkles as he

laughed. They came to rest on Elizabeth who flushed a little and, rising, curtsied to the two grown-ups.

'We trust we are not interrupting some important game,' said Lady Latimer.

'It was a silly game,' Robert Dudley told them.

'It was only silly because he couldn't play it,' retorted Elizabeth, which made Thomas roar with laughter.

'I didn't bother to play it, because I didn't want to,' Robert explained.

'Now, Robert Dudley,' Thomas admonished him, 'that's not gallant to our Princess, is it?'

Robert looked haughtily at the ceiling and Lady Latimer said quickly: 'Well, now it's ended and it is no great matter.' She went to Edward: 'And how is my Prince today?'

Edward said that he was very well, and she put her arms round him and hugged him. Edward was pink with pleasure. Thomas sat down and, putting one arm about Elizabeth and the other about Jane, drew them to him.

'You should not be playing verse games,' he said. 'You should be practising the new dances, because I have a feeling in my bones that soon you will be dancing at a wedding.'

Elizabeth drew back and stared at him. She said: 'Is the King going to take a new wife then?'

Thomas nodded slowly.

The others had joined them, and Lady Latimer sat beside Sir Thomas, Edward leaning against her, while the Dudley boys and the Grey girls stood silently by.

'Who is she?' demanded Elizabeth.

'That's the secret. Nobody knows.' Thomas burst out laughing. 'They are taking bets in the Court. They say that the ladies are not over eager.'

'Hush, Thomas,' said Lady Latimer warningly.

'We know,' answered Elizabeth, 'that my father's wives are – unlucky.'

'I wonder who'll be the sixth?' said Robert. Elizabeth frowned at him. How dared he speak so lightly of a royal marriage? He had too high an opinion of himself, that boy. *

She wished that she could dismiss all of them – even Lady Latimer – so that she could have the entire attention of Thomas. Now he was smiling at Jane and Catharine and Lady Latimer, as though he were just as fond of them as he was of Elizabeth.

Lady Latimer had risen to her feet. Perhaps she thought that the conversation was becoming dangerous. She began to hum and held out her hand. 'Come, Thomas, let us show them the latest Court dance. They can fall in behind us and follow our steps.'

'That's an excellent idea, Kate,' he said.

Elizabeth watched them do a few steps. She was scowling. When they danced in her apartment, she danced with Thomas, and Kat played the lute or the virginals or stood by, applauding and clapping her hands. She felt a sudden rush of jealousy. For with whom could she dance if it were not with Thomas?

She could not dance with Edward or Guildford; they were too small. There was only one other. He had taken her hand and she could see that he was mocking her.

'Very well,' she said, 'since you are the only one of the right size.'

She was surprised how well he could dance. He seemed to throw himself into it, his eyes watching the feet of Lady Latimer and Thomas Seymour; and Elizabeth, excited by the dance, forgot to be jealous.

'You dance well,' he said; and his eyes were suddenly mischievous. 'Your Grace,' he added.

Elizabeth lowered her head that he might not see the sudden laughter in her eyes. But he had seen it; and in a second they were laughing together.

Then Elizabeth knew that she and this boy could be friends. He was bold and arrogant. But then, so was she. They understood each other.

Prince Edward was waiting for a visit from his sister. He knew she would be with him soon, and he was glad because he looked forward to Elizabeth's visits. He tried so hard to be like her, because he knew that if he could be, that would please not only his father but his tutors, dear Mrs Penn and all those whose duty it was to look after him. But every time he was on a horse or playing games like tennis they were worried that something would happen to him. But he had to do these things because his father had been so good at all sports, and his father wished his son to be exactly like himself.

In truth he would have preferred to sit in a corner with Jane Grey and read their books together. He loved Jane more than anyone in the world. He could admit that to himself. He promised himself that when they were both grown up he would marry her. As for his sister Elizabeth, she was too vital; and although she was boisterously affectionate and excited him, in her presence he was always conscious of the contrast between them.

Elizabeth was always full of wild plans for new games. He believed that, with her governess, Kat Ashley, she played a game of make-believe all the time: she was the Queen and Kat her first adviser. It was the sort of game which Edward would have hated but Elizabeth would love, and that showed the difference between them.

Elizabeth came bursting in upon him, and he saw at once that something had happened to excite her. She was dressed in a green gown which made her eyes look more green than blue and her hair more red.

'Edward,' she said, 'I have got a secret to tell you. But perhaps it will not long be a secret. Perhaps soon the whole Court will be talking of it.'

Edward did not immediately ask her to tell the secret. He was a patient boy and, to tell the truth, he was always a little afraid of Court secrets.

Instead he said, because he knew that Elizabeth could always be lured away from a subject by a compliment: 'What a lovely dress! The colour suits you.'

She smiled down at the green folds of her gown. 'I need emeralds to show it off. One day perhaps I shall have some.'

He knew she was picturing herself on the throne.

'If I had a lot of money I would buy them for you.'

She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him. 'Dear Edward; what a nice brother you are!'

'But,' went on Edward, 'I have very little money. Only that which Uncle Tom gives me.'

Elizabeth smiled. Uncle Tom Seymour was her very good friend as well as Edward's very good uncle.

'Now this secret,' she said imperiously. 'Our father has chosen his sixth wife. I'll whisper who it is. It's Lady Latimer. They call her Katharine Parr, because that was her name before she was married. All the Court is talking about the King and Katharine Parr.'

Edward's face puckered. 'She is my friend,' he said.

'Well, now she will be your stepmother. Oh, Edward, we could not have a kinder. Why do you look so sad? Is it because the King's wives are so unlucky? I had thought of that, I confess.'

'Uncle Thomas--' began Edward.

'What of Uncle Thomas?' asked Elizabeth sharply.

'Well,' said Edward, 'he told me that I might have a new aunt and that she might be my Aunt Kate, Lady Latimer.'

Elizabeth turned away impatiently. She always felt annoyed when Tom Seymour paid attention to anyone other than herself. Then she laughed. 'If our father wants to marry Lady Latimer, poor Tom Seymour will have to find another wife, will he not?' she said.

'Yes,' answered Edward, 'but I think she might be happier with Uncle Tom.' There was someone at the door and as it opened, his eyes shone with pleasure for it was the little Lady Jane Grey. 'Here's Jane,' he said. 'Come in, Jane. Elizabeth has been telling me some news.'

Jane came quietly in, and Edward took her hand while Elizabeth asked: 'Have *you* heard the secret, Jane?'

Jane had not, and Elizabeth could not help giving her a scornful look. Jane never listened to gossip, preferring her lessons. Elizabeth thought that rather dull of her. All the same she was glad Jane had not heard, because she had the additional pleasure of telling her and there was little Elizabeth liked better than being the bearer of exciting news.

While she was telling Jane, Sir Thomas Seymour came in. Elizabeth looked at him earnestly to see if he knew. She wondered if it were true that he had wanted to marry Katharine Parr, and how such a man would feel to have a bride snatched from him by the King. Sir Thomas's looks betrayed nothing, and Elizabeth told herself that he had not yet heard.

'A merry good day to my Prince and the lovely ladies!' cried Sir Thomas. He took Edward's hand and kissed it. 'Your Highness,' he said. Then he took Elizabeth's hand

and kissed that. 'My dearest Lady Elizabeth.' Then Jane's. 'My charming Lady Jane.'

As soon as he entered, the very room seemed different. He could make Edward forget that he had a headache and make him believe that one day he might be as gay as Sir Thomas, which he was sure would please his father. Elizabeth felt as though she were indeed heiress to the crown and a very, very beautiful one. Even Jane felt contented in his company.

'You look like conspirators,' he accused them in his mocking way. 'Now, tell Uncle Thomas what plots are afoot.'

They were all silent, wondering whether it was wise to tell the secret which Elizabeth had brought to them.

'What!' cried Thomas, standing legs apart, his hand on the hilt of his sword. 'So you would hide your secrets from me! By my precious soul, I'll have your secrets from you.'

They all laughed delightedly as he narrowed his eyes and pretended to scowl at all of them.

'Will His Highness tell me?' Thomas picked up Edward and swung him towards the ceiling while Edward shrieked with delight.

With Thomas, thought Elizabeth, he is like a little boy. With the rest of us he is like a little old man.

Elizabeth was making signs to Edward. 'Don't tell,' she cried. 'Don't tell.' She wanted the game with Thomas to go on.

Thomas put Edward down and turned to Elizabeth who ran screaming round the room. He almost caught her but let her go. Edward was almost hysterical with laughter; even Lady Jane was smiling.

He had caught her; he was gripping her shoulders. 'Now you shall tell me,' he said.

'I shall not,' she answered.

'Would you deny that there is a secret?'

'I do not deny it. But it is my secret—mine—and I shall not share it with Sir Thomas Seymour unless I wish to.'

She met his gaze boldly and, as they stood thus, Kat Ashley ran hastily into the room.

She was panting and breathless.

'The King is on his way to visit the Prince,' she gasped. 'Lady Latimer is with him.'

Tom Seymour released Elizabeth, who put her hands up to tidy her hair. Tom stood straight up, the laughter fading from his eyes. Jane tried to hide herself among the hangings, and Edward looked frightened.

The doors of the apartment were flung wide open, and in came the King. He hobbled with the help of a stick and leaned on one of his gentlemen. He was a glittering figure. His doublet was of purple velvet slashed with gold cloth. Round his neck he wore a collar of gold, and from this hung an enormous pearl. His cloak was of the same purple velvet as his doublet, and jewels shone from all his garments.

A few steps behind him walked Lady Latimer, and Elizabeth noticed that as she came into the room she threw a sad glance in the direction of Thomas.

'Ha!' said the King. 'So here is my son, eh, and his sister with him.'

They had all knelt as he approached, and Elizabeth, peeping up through her lashes, caught his eyes upon her. She could not understand the expression she saw in those eyes which looked like little bits of blue china shining out through the layers of flesh.

'Rise,' he said. 'My son—' He held out a hand and Edward went forward. The King's hand was laid on

Edward's shoulder so heavily that the little boy seemed almost crushed beneath it. 'What a shrimp you are!' he complained. 'When I was your age I was twice your size.'

'I crave Your Majesty's pardon for my size,' said Edward.

'Do you ride every day, eh?'

'Yes, Sire.'

'Jump? Run? Swim? Play tennis?'

'Yes, Sire.'

'We'll have you jousting soon. I want to see you add something to yourself, this way and that way.' He stretched his arms as he spoke, outwards and upwards. Then he laughed to show them all that it was a joke, and they laughed heartily and dutifully.

He turned to Lady Latimer. 'I like to see you here, Kate,' he said, 'in the nursery.'

'It is my pleasure to be here, Sire,' answered Lady Latimer.

'Ha!' said the King, and his eyes had come to rest on Elizabeth. 'And what has my daughter to say this day?' he asked.

'That it is my pleasure to be here also, Sire,' Elizabeth promptly replied.

He looked at her broodingly. She never failed to rouse mixed feelings in him. She exasperated him because she possessed that rude health which was denied his son; he liked the sparkle of her, the vitality, that air of dignity slightly mixed with impudence. She was *his* daughter, and no mistake about it. If only she had had another mother—

Then he thought of her mother, and was angry with her. It was always thus when he was face to face with this disturbing daughter of his.

He ignored Lady Jane and Sir Thomas Seymour. This was a family meeting, and today he regarded them merely as attendants.

'Lady Latimer is to be your stepmother,' he announced. 'I command you to love her.'

'We already love her, Sire,' said Elizabeth. 'But since Your Majesty commands it, will do so even more.'

'It is so, Sire,' Edward added in his high voice.

Mrs Penn had come bustling out with the ornate chair which was kept in the apartment for the King's sole use, but Henry waved her away.

'Enough!' he said. 'I shall not stay.' He glowered at Mrs Penn. 'The Prince continues puny,' he growled.

'Tis all the more reason, Your Majesty,' retorted Mrs Penn, 'why he should not be sent out early of a morning to ride a great beast that is too fierce for him.'

Elizabeth trembled at Mrs Penn's temerity, but the King was in a mellow mood and he merely laughed. He knew how much she loved Edward and what great care she took of him, and he was really very pleased with her.

He took Edward's cheek between his thumb and forefinger. Edward winced, but the gesture brought a little colour to his face.

'That's how I want to see you looking, my son,' said the King. 'Remember you're the heir to the throne—the only male heir until I have more sons.'

Edward felt suddenly wildly happy. He was thinking that if the King married and had more sons, he himself would not be so important to his father. It would be wonderful to shed a little of the responsibility.

'Come, Kate,' said the King, 'we'll have the children to their lessons. It pleases me that they love you already.'

He winced as he started to walk; then turning, he took Lady Latimer's arm. All in the apartment fell once more

to their knees as the King, with Lady Latimer and his attendants, left the apartment.

Elizabeth took a quick look at Sir Thomas. She was sure that he was looking angry but, when he caught her eyes upon him, he smiled.

The door shut, and Thomas said. 'So that was your secret.'

'It was not a secret to you,' Elizabeth retorted. 'You knew.'

'Yes, Lady Latimer told me.' Then he turned to Edward and said: 'But our Prince looks sad. Is it the prospect of having a new stepmother?'

'Indeed it is not,' Edward answered. 'I was wishing I had some money.'

'Is your royal purse empty then?'

'Quite empty,' sighed Edward. 'And there is something I wish to buy.'

'Tell us,' said Elizabeth.

'It is a secret—from you.'

Elizabeth smiled. She believed that he wanted to give her some present, so she did not press the matter.

'I will tell Uncle Tom,' said Edward.

'And Uncle Tom will be most happy to advance you the money,' said Tom. 'You know my purse is always at the disposal of Your Highness.'

'Uncle Tom, come over here and I will whisper to you.'

Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders and turned to speak to Lady Jane, who was still feeling the effect of the King's visit and looking like a frightened fawn.

When they were out of earshot of the girls, Tom stooped so that his ear was on a level with Edward's mouth.

'I want to buy some green ribands for Elizabeth's hair,' said Edward. 'She loves ribands, but can never afford them. She needs emeralds—but she cannot have those yet.'

'You shall give her ribands, nephew.'

'Thank you, Uncle Thomas. How can I ever repay you all the money you have given me?'

'When you are King of England I doubt not that you will find some means of repaying me,' answered Thomas lightly. 'Meanwhile accept this.'

He put a purse into the pocket of Edward's doublet.

Edward flushed with pleasure. 'You will always be my favourite uncle and one of my favourite people,' he told Thomas. 'I want to show you an essay Jane has written. It is very good.'

He called to Jane, who came over, leaving Elizabeth sitting in the window seat watching them. And after a while Thomas left Jane and Edward, and joined her there.

'It is all secrets, is it not?' said Thomas, sitting down beside her. 'The secrets of the Princess—the secrets of the Prince—'

'My secret is a secret no longer,' answered Elizabeth. 'And I can guess what Edward's was. He was asking you for money again.'

'To buy something pretty,' whispered Thomas.

'For me?'

'Do not ask me to betray his secrets, but you will look very beautiful in them—that's if your guess is correct.'

'But how can I, if it is not—' Elizabeth burst out laughing. 'Oh, Tom, you are teasing me again.' She was sober suddenly. 'Do you mind—that she is going to marry the King?'

He looked at her in mock surprise. 'Should not all good subjects be delighted in the King's happiness?' he asked.

'If the King took what they also hoped for—perhaps not,' she answered pertly.

'You listen to gossip, my Princess.'

'I have a pair of ears and a pair of eyes. I use them.'

‘Allow me to compliment you upon them,’ he said. ‘So the King is to marry, and Lady Latimer is to marry. Well, perhaps that is a fate which will overtake *you* one day, my Princess.’ He was smiling, and he did not look in the least like a disappointed man. ‘The marriage of the Princess Elizabeth!’ he murmured. ‘When it takes place, *I* shall be there.’

She drew back, conscious of a deep excitement. How could she help it if pictures darted in and out of her mind? At that moment she had seen a picture of herself on her father’s throne; she was wearing the crown on her red head, so she was Queen of England. There was a man sitting beside her, and that man was Sir Thomas Seymour.



4

The Admiral's Proposal

So King Henry VIII married Katharine Parr, his sixth wife, and the young Elizabeth found that the new Queen was as much her friend as her two previous stepmothers, Anne of Cleves and Catharine Howard, had been.

Queen Katharine Parr pleaded with the King to give his daughter an apartment in the Palace of Whitehall, and begged that she be treated as his daughter.

Since Edward loved his sister so dearly it was decided that they should have lessons together, and Elizabeth

shared his tutors—Sir John Cheke, Dr Cox and Sir Anthony Cooke.

Kat Ashley stayed with Elizabeth, and these were happy years, but whenever they were alone together Kat would hint that the possibilities of Elizabeth's one day being Queen[†] were growing stronger.

When Elizabeth lay in the great fourposter bed, Kat would draw the curtains and creep in beside her; they would feel shut away from the world, and Kat would whisper: 'Move over, Your Majesty. Make room for poor old Kat.'

And Elizabeth would giggle and say: 'Hush! Hush! That's treason.' But she liked to be called 'Your Majesty' all the same. She did not stop to think that she could only be Queen if Edward and Mary died. She only knew that she wanted to be Queen of England above everything else.

With this in view she worked hard at her lessons. She studied history and languages, for a Queen must master these two subjects. She watched the intrigues which went on at Court and often she would say to herself: 'Now if I were Queen I would do this—or that.'

It was dangerous thinking, but Elizabeth was reckless by nature; and of course she never spoke her thoughts aloud to anyone but Kat.

There was a time when Katharine Parr, that kind step-mother whom Elizabeth had grown to love even more dearly than she had loved Catharine Howard and Anne of Cleves, was in acute danger. This was when Katharine was discovered to be interested in the Reformed Religion. A friend of Katharine's named Anne Askew was sent to the stake for her religious opinions, and at that time the Court was saying that Katharine Parr would go the way of Anne Boleyn and Catharine Howard.

But the storm blew over. The King was sick, and

Katherine was such a good nurse; none could dress his sore leg as she could. Henry realized that he could not do without his sixth wife, and so Katharine's life was preserved.

Elizabeth rejoiced when she heard that the King was affectionate towards his wife once more; but at the same time she could not help being glad that they had no children, although this was really the main cause of the King's irritation with the Queen.

'As matters stand,' Kat said, as they lay whispering behind the drawn curtains of the fourposter, 'you are only two steps from the throne. Edward and Mary—those are the two steps between the throne and yourself.'

When Elizabeth was thirteen she and Edward were separated. Elizabeth was sent to live at Enfield, and Edward to Hertford.

Edward was heartbroken and wrote to her, telling her how unhappy he was without her.

'We shall be together again,' Elizabeth told Kat. 'Why do they separate us now?'

'I believe it is because the King grows more infirm each day. I wouldn't dare say this to anyone else, but I'll whisper it to you, my lady. Your little princely brother will soon be your little kingly brother. Mark my words!'

'And if he were—' mused Elizabeth.

She did not have to go on because Kat read her thoughts. If he were King, then Elizabeth would be only two steps from the throne.

How long the days seemed at Enfield Palace. Elizabeth felt as though she were waiting for great events to burst upon her.

She was no longer a child, being over thirteen years old.

Kat would sit with her in the big room which was known as the Princess's Eating Parlour, and Elizabeth would stare fretfully at the mosaic ceiling. She was tired of this room; she was tired of Enfield. She wanted to know what was happening at Court.

Kat said to her: 'If you could only amuse yourself by doing a little tapestry, as most ladies do, the time would quickly pass.'

Elizabeth walked up and down the room impatiently. 'Tapestry! It would bore me, Kat. I don't want to sit at my tatting like some helpless little girl. I want—'

'I know, my love. You want to rule this kingdom.'

'Kat! Be careful.'

'There's none but ourselves here.'

'What if one of these marriages, which my father is trying to arrange for me, should actually take place?'

'Then, my love, you would doubtless be whisked away from England to be an important lady in some other land.'

Elizabeth stamped a foot. 'I would never leave England. I belong to England as England belongs to me.'

'Now it's my turn to say, "Hush, my lady".'

Elizabeth frowned. 'When I was a baby, my father made a match for me with the son of the King of France. But when my mother was—when my mother died—the King of France no longer wanted me as a bride for the Duc d'Angoulême. Then I was promised to the Earl of Arran's heir. What a match for me—the King's daughter!'

'It was shameful!' agreed Kat.

'Then there was a plan to marry me to Philip of Spain.'

'That would be a worthy match, my love.'

'I should be Queen of Spain.' Elizabeth's eyes kindled. 'But Kat, I do not want to be Queen of Spain. I want to be—'

'Hush! Hush! Some of the serving men and maids are

only waiting to carry tales. Two steps from the throne, my love—but two dangerous steps.'

Elizabeth turned away impatiently and went to the chimney-piece. There she had traced a Latin distich with her initials beneath it. It had beguiled away a few hours and made her feel less restless.

Kat had come to stand beside her. 'It is not the thought of marriage that is distasteful to my lady,' she whispered. 'It is merely that as yet the right suitor has not been offered to her, eh? Methinks the Lady Elizabeth would never accept a husband chosen for her. She is of a temper to choose for herself!'

Elizabeth clasped her hands together. Yes, Kat was right. She wanted always to make her own decisions.

Then she thought of Thomas Seymour. If Edward were King, his favourite uncle would be a very important man at Court. How important? Important enough to marry the King's sister?

Strangely enough she did think of another. That was the dark-eyed boy with whom she had once danced, and whom she saw from time to time. He grew bolder and more handsome with the years.

She had forgotten that she was in this Palace of Enfield with Kat. She saw herself smiling from one to another of those two—Sir Thomas Seymour and young Robert Dudley.

It was a bleak January day, and the bitter winds were blowing about the walls of the Enfield Palace. The new year, 1547, had come in to the tune of bitter cold and blizzards.

Elizabeth was translating into Latin a sermon which she decided she would send to Edward when it was

finished. 'This I have done for your pleasure,' she would write to him. 'It comes to you in place of myself.'

It was nearly two months since she had seen him, but there had been many letters and tokens exchanged between Enfield and Hertford.

Then suddenly Elizabeth heard a fanfare of trumpets, and she ran to the window. She could hear sounds below, which indicated that visitors had arrived; calling Kat, she ran down the great staircase to see who had come.

She was struck immediately by the ceremonial attitude of the guards who were now standing in the hall.

'What is this?' she cried. 'Who comes to us here at Enfield?'

And then she saw the Earl of Hertford and Sir Anthony Brown, and with them a small, thin figure swaddled against the cold.

'Edward!' she cried, and ran to him.

But the Earl of Hertford held up a hand to stop her.

Some of the wrappings were removed from Edward, and there he stood, pale and shivering, looking as frightened as he used to look when their father made his calls at the nursery.

But something was changed. Was it the attitude of these men towards little Edward? Everyone seemed to be looking at him with awe, as though he were no longer their puny little Prince.

Then Elizabeth understood.

The heralds blew several blasts on their trumpets. Elizabeth stood very still and erect, listening to the fanfare.

Then Lord Hertford proclaimed, to all those who had assembled in the hall, the new titles of the Prince.

'Edward the Sixth, by Grace of God King of England, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith and Sovereign of the most noble Order of the Garter.'

So it had happened. King Henry VIII was dead. And little Edward, not yet ten years old, was King of England.

The next day Edward was taken to London. He and Elizabeth had spent some time together the previous night and Edward had told her that he was a little alarmed to be King.

'Everyone behaves differently to me now,' he said. 'They all make a great fuss of me, whereas before they did not always notice me.'

'Oh, Edward,' cried Elizabeth, 'it is the most wonderful thing in the world to wear the crown.'

'I do not think it is very comfortable, and I am afraid of all these men who tell me what I must do.'

'Everyone will be seeking favours from you now, Edward.'

'You ask me a favour, and I will grant it,' he begged her.

'I want to leave Enfield. I am weary of it.'

'Then you shall. I shall order it.' Edward looked perplexed. 'You are not very old, Elizabeth. You will have to have a guardian. I know, you shall be under the guardianship of our stepmother, the Queen. You will like that.'

'Yes, I think I shall.'

So it was that Elizabeth and Kat Ashley left Enfield for the Dormer Palace of Chelsea, which had been built by Henry VIII. This was a charming little palace set among green fields, and its gardens ran down to the river Thames.

Queen Katharine was very pleased to have Elizabeth with her, and gave her a warm welcome.

As the royal widow, Queen Katharine was living very

quietly at this time, but Elizabeth guessed that she could not be very saddened by the death of the King who, such a short time ago, had considered taking her life. Indeed Queen Katharine looked younger and prettier as a widow than she ever had when a Queen.

'After a while,' Elizabeth told Kat, 'I shall be able to go to Court and be near Edward. Then, who knows what wonderful things will happen to me?'

'You are safer here at the Dormer Palace, my sweeting,' Kat told her.

Although Queen Katharine was living in retirement for the present, a frequent visitor to the Dormer Palace was Sir Thomas Seymour. True to his promise, Edward had showered honours on his favourite uncle, and Thomas was now created Lord Sudley. He had already been Lord Admiral of England. He seemed more jaunty than ever, and sometimes Elizabeth thought that he came to the Dormer Palace to see her, sometimes to comfort Queen Katharine.

Not far from the Palace was a bridge which was known as Blandels Bridge. This was a beautiful place even in winter, although few people would venture near it after dusk, for it was reputed to be a favourite spot of robbers and cut-throats, and many a murder had been committed there.

Elizabeth liked to walk in the gardens alone. These gardens had been made very attractive with lovely lawns and fishponds; but Elizabeth's adventurous spirit tempted her to go farther afield and, although it was forbidden, she often put on a heavy cloak with a hood, to hide her bright hair and her identity, and slipped out of the grounds.

She frequently found her footsteps led her to Blandels Bridge, for the thought of danger lured her there.

It was a very cold day and hoar frost glistened on the bushes as Elizabeth stood at the bridge and looked along the river towards Westminster. She wondered what Edward was doing now.

Then suddenly a cloaked figure rose up from the bushes and Elizabeth's heart began to beat wildly. In that instant she remembered the stories she had heard of people who had been waylaid and murdered, and she wished that she had listened to good advice and taken it.

But she would not allow herself to show fear.

'Who is that?' she cried. The figure came swiftly towards her. The collar of the cloak was turned up to hide the lower part of the face, and the hat was pulled down over the eyes.

'Answer me!' commanded Elizabeth. But there *was* no answer; and Elizabeth, realizing that against such a powerful figure she would be helpless, turned and began to walk away. The footsteps behind her quickened. Elizabeth broke into a run; her pursuer was also running.

She felt her cloak firmly grasped and then she was held tightly in a pair of arms.

'What are you doing here?' said a voice which tried to be stern but which had an undercurrent of laughter in it.

'Thomas! So it's you!'

The hood had fallen back from her head and she was laughing up at him with relief.

'You are a bad child,' he said. 'You deserve to be whipped.'

'How dare you talk to me like that!'

'There's a lot I'd dare for the sake of Elizabeth.'

'Please call me "Princess" or "My Lady" when you address me.'

He released her and swept her a mocking bow. 'I had

forgotten,' he said. 'The Lady Elizabeth has become a very important personage since the death of her father.'

'And what do you mean by that?' She knew of course. She was thinking, even as he was: Edward – Mary – and then Elizabeth – *Queen* Elizabeth!

He did not answer but merely looked at her in his merry way.

'If I were to report in some quarters that I had discovered the *Princess* Elizabeth wandering alone –'

'But you would not,' she interrupted. 'You must not. I forbid it.'

He raised his eyebrows. Then he laughed and his mood changed. He took her hand and kissed it. 'If I do not tell,' he said, 'it will not be because the Princess forbids it, but because I wish to please the Princess.'

'It matters not for what reason,' retorted Elizabeth, 'as long as you do not tell.'

'I followed you here,' he said. 'I wanted a word with you – far away from prying eyes.'

'What did you want of me?'

'You are no longer a child,' he said, 'and princesses marry young.'

'You are suggesting that I should marry?'

'It will be a question to occupy the mind of your brother, the King, I doubt not.'

'When I marry,' she said haughtily, 'I shall choose my own husband.'

'So I believe you will. But you have forgotten the conditions of your father's will.'

Yes, she had forgotten that. She had been so elated for three reasons. She had been placed third in the line of succession; she was to receive three thousand pounds a year (and so never have to wonder where her next gown was coming from); and she was to have a marriage portion

of ten thousand pounds. She had forgotten these would only be hers if she married with the consent of her brother, King Edward and his Council.

His Council! That was the point.

Her blue-green eyes glinted. She could persuade Edward to let her marry whom she wished; but his Council would have to be won over too.

'I would make Edward agree to what I wanted.'

'We both would,' said Thomas, and he was looking at her intently.

'I do not understand—' she began.

But he shook his head. 'You understand full well, my Princess. One day you may be Queen of England. I should like to be beside you if you were—and if you were not, still I should like to be beside you.'

Her heart was beating fast. There was no one who amused her and excited and pleased her as much as this bold, handsome man.

She said quietly: 'I see that this is a proposal of marriage, Lord Sudley.'

'And what is your answer?'

'That it is not made in a manner fitting to my rank; but I—I will consider it.'

Then they walked back to the Palace, and Elizabeth went in through the gardens that none might know that she had played truant from the Palace grounds. Thomas went on to call on Queen Katharine.

Elizabeth summoned Kat as soon as she reached her own apartments.

'Kat,' she said, 'something has happened. Thomas Seymour has suggested—that I might marry him!'

'No! He has dared to say that to you!'

'Yes, Kat, he has.'

'Oh, the bold man! And what was your answer?'

'I told him I would think of it.'

'Why, bless my soul,' said Kat severely—and this time she really was severe—'I can see you are of a mind to say yes to him.'

'I have not yet considered my answer.'

'But you are more inclined to say Yes than No, eh? Oh, my lady, this is no laughing matter. The Council would never agree to such a marriage.'

'Kat, if they did not agree—what would happen?'

'You remember your father's will. You would lose your place if you married without the consent of the King and his Council.'

'Let us not consider the King. I have but to ask Edward and he will give me what I want.'

'My dearest Princess, what the King says is of no consequence if the Council do not agree. They are determined that no more power shall go to Thomas Seymour. Oh, he is a wily man. He looks ahead. Perhaps he sees you on the throne, and himself beside you.'

'He has always been my very good friend.'

'My precious, you are no longer a child. You are a Princess only two steps from the throne. What you do is of the utmost importance. One false step and you could lose all that we have dreamed of—all that we have planned.'

Elizabeth turned angrily from Kat. She knew that what her governess said was true.

She imagined spending the rest of her life with merry Thomas. What fun life would be! Now she knew how real that dream she and Kat had built up together had become. Its fulfilment was the most important thing in her life.

'Where are you going?' asked Kat.

'I am going to write a letter,' said Elizabeth.

Kat followed her and stood over her while she wrote.

'From the Princess Elizabeth to the Lord Admiral.'

She looked up unhappily into Kat's eyes. Kat said: 'It's the only way, my lady.'

Then Elizabeth nodded and went on writing.

'I have neither the years nor the inclination for marriage and I would not have thought that the matter should have been mentioned to me at a time when I ought to be weeping for the death of my father, the King.'

When the letter was finished she gave it to Kat to deliver. Kat had said that no one but herself should be trusted with it, and Elizabeth suddenly realized that since the death of the King her position had changed. She was now a person who could well become the centre of intrigue; she was a girl who would be continually under the observation of ambitious men.

Was Thomas one of these ambitious men? Had he wanted to marry her because she was his dear Elizabeth or because she was the Princess, only two steps from the throne of England?



5

A Black Velvet Gown

Elizabeth was lying in her bed at the Dormer Palace. The winter had passed, and the lovely month of May had come. It was a warm night and she had not allowed Kat to draw the curtains about her bed; so she could see her room, softened by moonlight.

She was thinking of Edward whom she had seen that day. He was weighed down with his responsibilities and had confided in her that he was not so happy now as he had been when he was merely heir to the throne.

How I would enjoy being in his place! thought Elizabeth.

Then suddenly she heard a rustle below. It was the crackle of bushes, the snap of twig. It might have been the sound of a footstep.

Elizabeth was out of bed in a second, kneeling on the window seat and looking out over the gardens.

The trees and the flowerbeds looked ghostly; and the fishponds shimmered in the pale moonlight. But Elizabeth was not interested in them. She had seen a figure emerge from the shelter of a clump of firs. Someone was making his way towards the house.

It was! There was no doubt of it. Thomas Seymour, Lord Sudley, Lord Admiral of England.

Elizabeth drew back from the window, her heart beating fast.

‘Why is he coming here?’ she whispered to herself.

She went back to her bed and drew the curtains. An hour passed, and still she lay listening. It became clear to her that whomsoever Thomas Seymour came to see at the Dormer Palace, it was not the Princess Elizabeth.

She dozed and woke again. And when the dawn came she heard footsteps on the path below, and going to her window she saw him again. This time he was stealing away.

He visited the Dormer Palace next day, calling like an ordinary visitor this time, and not sneaking across the gardens in moonlight like a thief.

She sent a messenger to him. ‘The Princess Elizabeth wishes to see the Lord Admiral before he leaves the Palace.’

He came promptly, his eyes alight with mischief. He had quickly forgiven her the letter she had written to him, and had implied that he did not really accept her first refusal.

He took her hand and would have kissed it, but she snatched it away.

'I should like to know what you were doing, stealing into the Palace at midnight,' she demanded.

He stared at her, and she was gratified to know that she had temporarily caught him off his guard.

'Who has been telling you these tales?' he asked.

'My ears!' she snapped. 'My eyes! First I heard you, then I saw you.'

He was silent for a few seconds, as though considering how he could best excuse himself. Then he began to laugh in the old boisterous manner.

'Come with me,' he said. 'You shall have your explanation.'

He led her to her stepmother's apartments. Katharine was working at her needlework, and it struck Elizabeth that she had never looked so young nor so pretty.

'Kate,' said Thomas, 'we are unmasked.'

Katharine stood up, and the needlework dropped from her hand.

'Who—?' she murmured. 'What—?'

'The Princess's ears and eyes have betrayed us. First she heard me, then she saw me. She knows I am visiting the Palace by night.'

'Elizabeth, my dear,' said Katharine, coming towards the Princess and taking her hand, 'we have wonderful news, and you shall be the first to hear it. Thomas and I are married.'

Elizabeth was startled. Thomas—who had asked her, Elizabeth, to marry him—in this short time had married her stepmother. She could not believe it. She would not believe it. But as she looked from Katharine to Thomas she knew that it was true.

'Well,' said Katharine, 'you will congratulate us, will you not.'

Elizabeth drew herself up to her full height. 'I congratulate you,' she said. And she could not help adding, not without a trace of malice: 'But I do not think the Council will be so ready with their congratulations when they know that the Lord Admiral has married the Queen when—when her late husband, the King, is scarcely cold in his grave!'

With that she left them.

But after a while Thomas came to her apartments. Kat let him in, and he found Elizabeth sitting in the window seat looking over the gardens, the colour high in her cheeks.

'You are angry with me?' asked the Admiral gently.

She did not look round as she answered: 'You asked my hand in marriage and, when I refused you, went straight to my stepmother and asked for hers. I understand. You considered me the better prize because—' She gulped and went on recklessly: 'Because I could wear the crown in my own right.'

'You turned me away,' said Thomas.

'I could not marry without the consent of the Council.'

'The Queen could not marry without the consent of the Council, but she did.'

'Then she was foolish to do so.'

'You are not pleased by my marriage?'

Her chin went up higher. 'Yes, I am pleased. You are a man of some knowledge, Admiral, and you thought me the higher prize since you asked me first. You make me realize my value.'

'Were you ever in doubt of it?' he asked, nocking.

'I find you too bold, Admiral.'

'We are both bold, Princess. That is why there is this bond between us. Do not be angry. As you told me in

your letter, you are too young for marriage. But now I am married to your stepmother we shall live under the same roof; and I shall be as a father to you. The prospect, I am sure, will please you as it pleases me.'

Elizabeth had turned towards him, and she began to laugh. It did please her. What could be better? She would see a great deal of this man whose company delighted her, and she could do so without any difficulties with the Council. Now she came to consider it, she was not really displeased with the turn of events.

The marriage was no longer a secret and the whole Court professed itself to be deeply shocked that the Dowager Queen had married so soon after the death of the King.

Thomas and Katharine were called before the Council. Edward was presiding, but of course he had to say what was expected of him and he found the Council meetings an added burden to his many responsibilities.

This was different from all other Council meetings. Edward studied his uncle and stepmother with alarm, but Thomas looked jaunty enough as he faced the Council with his merry smile, and said: 'You forget I had the King's consent to my marriage. His Majesty will confirm this.'

And Edward, looking at Uncle Thomas, felt suddenly that he would not allow them to punish these two whom he loved so much. He was the King, and for once all his ministers were going to do as he wanted.

It was true that Thomas had asked his consent and he had given it. He had been so proud that he was the only one to share their secret – which he had promised to keep, even from Elizabeth.

So ten-year-old Edward rapped on the table and stood up; and for once his heavy state robes became him.

'Let us have no more condemnation of this marriage between Lord Sudley and the Dowager Queen. My consent was asked and given. The matter is closed!'

The Council were astonished; but Edward, seeing the shining approval in the eyes of his dear uncle and step-mother, felt happier than he could remember feeling before; he realized that there were times when it was a pleasant thing to be a King.

Elizabeth was growing up. She was now approaching her fourteenth birthday. It was pleasant to be the good friend of the King. Often she met Robert Dudley at the Court, and he was very deferential to her. He did not have to be told to treat her with courtesy now. She wondered whether his manner had changed since she had edged a little nearer to the throne. The encounter with Thomas Sevmour had taught her something.

'And the more I know of people, the better I shall be able to govern them—when the time comes,' Elizabeth told herself.

She saw little of Mary, who had been very shocked indeed by the marriage of Thomas and the Dowager Queen. She had written to Elizabeth suggesting that she should come and live with her in her Manor at Wanstead.

'You must be most unhappy,' she wrote, 'living in a house with a lady who was so recently the wife of our father and is now the wife of another.'

When Elizabeth received that letter she was perplexed. She had learned that it was very important not to offend Mary; for, if Edward were to die, Mary would be the Queen. Elizabeth was sure that if Mary were Queen her own position would not be nearly so comfortable as it was

while her brother Edward was reigning. Therefore she must be very careful not to offend Mary.

She was a long time considering her reply.

'We must submit with patience to that which cannot be cured, for neither of us is in a position to offer any objection to what has taken place. We must try to forget the pain we have received at the disrespect with which our father's memory has been treated. But I cannot come to you because the Queen has shown me so much friendship that if I withdrew myself from her protection I should appear ungrateful. I feel my place to be with the Queen, who has been appointed my guardian.'

She re-read the letter and, thinking of the pale face of Edward, it occurred to her that Mary might indeed soon be Queen, so she added: 'I shall always pay the greatest deference to the instructions you may give me, and submit to whatsoever Your Highness shall be pleased to ordain.'

She showed the letter to Kat, who read it through and said: 'Our Princess grows up. She is becoming the perfect diplomat.'

Elizabeth sealed the letter and sent it off to Mary.

Now that it was known that Thomas and Katharine were married they went on a honeymoon together, which they spent at one of the houses which had come to Thomas with his new title and which was known as Sudley Castle.

Elizabeth naturally did not accompany them but spent the time between the Dormer Palace in Chelsea and yet another pleasant manor house—Hanworth. Since she enjoyed the affection of her brother, the King, and was acknowledged to be second in succession to the throne, she was allowed to have her own household and a retinue of servants, all her own. Kat still remained her governess and *confidante*; the friendship between them was too firm to be affected by Elizabeth's new importance.

She now had, as tutor, the very learned William Grindall, and applied herself to her lessons with all that enthusiasm which was typical of her. Her great desire was to be ready for the part whenever it might come to her. Thus she would study the history of other countries as well as her own; she would consider the judgments of rulers and try to learn from them. She became fluent in several languages. A Queen, she told herself, would need to be able to talk with the ambassadors of foreign countries.

That September Elizabeth was fourteen.

'It is quite old,' she said to Kat. 'Many girls are married at fourteen, particularly Princesses.'

Kat admitted this was true. 'The seamstresses have finished your new dress, my lady,' she added.

'And it seems you do not like it.'

'Black velvet!' said Kat. 'I confess I think you too young for black velvet.'

'And you have just admitted that I am quite old! Where is the new dress? I want to see it.'

'I have laid it on your bed. I suggest that you give it away and have something bright. A lovely blue – or green, shall we say.'

'Oh, Kat, you make me impatient. I am weary of being a child. Don't you know I want to be grown up?'

'Black velvet only makes you look older, my lady. You're still the same underneath.'

Elizabeth went to the bed, and there was the dress. It was beautiful. She picked it up and held it against her.

'You're the vainest creature!' scolded Kat.

'Hold your tongue, Kat Ashley,' retorted Elizabeth. 'If I want to be vain, I shall be vain.'

She heard the sound of voices in the grounds below, and

she forgot the dress momentarily and ran to the window. She stood very still. Down there were her stepmother and Thomas. They had returned from their honeymoon and were with her at the Manor at Hanworth. Elizabeth was glad they were home. It was pleasant to feel she had a mother at last, even though she was a stepmother. But she had discovered that Katharine Parr was the kindest, gentlest stepmother anyone could possibly have. As for Thomas, he made a very merry stepfather.

'Kat,' said Elizabeth. 'Help me into the velvet. I am going down to join them.'

Kat clicked her tongue. 'Leave them to enjoy each other's company. There is too much romping when you and the Admiral are together. It is unseemly in—'

'In an Admiral?' queried Elizabeth.

'Yes, indeed yes—and in the—'

'The future Queen of England,' supplied Elizabeth. 'Kat, bring me my gold bracelet. It will go well with the black velvet.'

'The velvet is unsuitable for the garden, my lady.'

'That is for me to decide,' said Elizabeth. 'Will you help me, or shall I ring for some of my servants?'

Kat sighed and helped Elizabeth out of the simple gown she was wearing, and into the black velvet.

'And the bracelet?'

Kat brought it. Elizabeth put it on her head so that it looked like a miniature crown.

'Oh—Your Majesty!' cried Kat, and she burst out laughing. 'I can well imagine you! My darling, you look the part.'

'Down on your knees and ask pardon for your impertinence in daring to tell me what to wear!' cried Elizabeth.

Kat went down on her knees in mock ceremony, which

made Elizabeth laugh so much that the bracelet slid from her head.

Kat crawled on the floor to retrieve it from where it had rolled, but Elizabeth was solemn. 'Oh, Kat, was that a bad omen?'

'Nonsense, my sweeting, there couldn't be any bad omens for you. You are made for success.'

Elizabeth was comforted; she held out her hand, so that Kat might put the bracelet on her wrist and then, lifting the skirts of black velvet, she ran out into the garden to join Katharine and Thomas.

Katharine greeted her with pleasure, but Thomas raised an eyebrow.

'Is this our stepdaughter?' he asked. 'Is this the Lady Elizabeth?'

'You know it is,' retorted Elizabeth.

'In black!' complained Thomas. 'I like not children in black.'

'I am no child,' answered Elizabeth. 'And whether or not you like my gown is no concern of yours, nor of mine.'

Katharine was smiling at their banter. She liked to see them joke and play together.

'I pray you,' said Thomas, 'go back to your women and tell them your stepfather commands them to attire you in a more suitable gown.'

'I shall do no such thing.'

Elizabeth turned away haughtily but, as she did so, Thomas caught at the skirt of her dress.

'How dare you!' cried Elizabeth and tried to jerk herself away, so fiercely that part of the skirt was torn from the bodice.

'Don't tease her, Thomas,' begged Katharine. 'You tease her too much sometimes.'

'She is in mourning for someone, I do declare,' went on Thomas. 'Who is it, daughter?'

'I wear black because I like it,' answered Elizabeth. 'That is all the reason you need to know.'

'Elizabeth! You must not speak thus to your stepfather.'

'He has torn my dress and will have to pay for a new one.'

'The Princess Elizabeth is a very avaricious young woman,' teased Thomas. 'Kate, join with me. We'll teach this daughter of ours that she must obey her stepmother and father. If she will not promise us not to wear the offending black again, we will make sure that she cannot.'

'Thomas,' laughed Katharine, 'how you love your childish games! Sometimes I wonder whether you ever grew up.'

'Kate, hold her for me, will you.' His blue eyes were alight with laughter. 'Come, Kate. This will be fun.'

Katharine could never refuse any request he made, so she seized Elizabeth by the shoulders and held her. Elizabeth was suddenly still, watching Thomas, who had taken a jewelled dagger from his belt.

Numb with astonishment, she watched him while he took the voluminous skirt in his hand and ran his dagger through the material. She gasped and struggled, but Katharine was holding her firmly, and Thomas went on ripping the velvet skirt into strips.

They were all panting and laughing together; and there was Elizabeth with the black velvet in ribbons about her.

Katharine recovered herself first. 'This is most unseemly,' she said. 'Elizabeth, you must go to your apartments at once. I trust no one has seen our childish romp.'

Elizabeth obeyed. Several people had seen: Kat Ashley was one; Thomas Parry, her cofferer, another—not to mention many attendants and servants.

In the household of Katharine Parr and the Lord Admiral people began to chatter. It was whispered that the Admiral had, before his marriage to Katharine Parr, sought an alliance with the Princess Elizabeth. Thomas Parry recalled that the Admiral had asked him how rich the Princess was.

And his manner to her was now giving cause for gossip. The servants could never forget that they had seen him and his wife cut her black velvet dress to pieces. It was surely not the manner in which a stately Dowager Queen and her Admiral husband should behave. Nor should a Princess be submitted to such indignity.

Katharine was warned of the whisperings. She was shocked to learn that Thomas had contemplated marrying Elizabeth, before he had asked her. It was something she had not dreamed of.

She was so happy because, for the first time in her life, she was going to have a child, and this she had always longed for.

She felt now that she wanted to be alone in her own home with her own husband. The presence of the Princess disturbed her, and one day she sent for Elizabeth and told her that she felt it would be advisable if the Princess left the household and went, under the care of her governess, back to Hatfield House or the Manor at Ashridge.

Elizabeth, also alarmed by the gossip, bowed her head to this decision and agreed to go. Katharine said a sad goodbye to her and Elizabeth felt sorry that they must part like this.

In Hatfield House Elizabeth returned to the old routine. William Grindall had caught the plague and died, and Elizabeth wanted in his place Roger Ascham, who had been Grindall's tutor and whom she knew through

Grindall. Elizabeth's wish was granted, for Edward liked her to have what she wanted when it was in his power to give it to her; and in Hatfield House Elizabeth once again gave up her wildness and devoted herself to study.

Here she learned Greek, studying the Greek Testament and reading Sophocles; she also studied Latin and read Cicero and Livy. And, as she did not give up her study of French and Italian, lessons filled a great part of her day.

Then one day Kat came to her, her eyes swollen with crying, and Elizabeth knew that some terrible catastrophe had happened.

'You had better tell me quickly,' she said.

'Oh, my lady, my lady, this is going to make you sad.'

'I said, tell me quickly, Kat,' commanded Elizabeth.

'The Dowager Queen—'

'She has a child?'

Kat nodded.

'A boy?'

'No, a girl.'

'And it lives?'

'But the Dowager Queen—'

'Oh no, Kat! She is not—*dead*!'

Elizabeth threw herself into her governess's arms and they cried together, cried for good, gentle, kind Katharine Parr, the King's sixth Queen, whom they would never see again.

But that was not all. Kat did not tell her the rest until they were in bed that night and she had drawn the curtains about them.

Then she said: 'There are rumours, sweeting.'

'Rumours, Kat? What rumours?'

'It is said that she died in fearful suspicion of her husband. She thought he wanted her to die. She thought that — he poisoned her.'

‘Thomas! But that is not possible.’

‘We know that. But others believe the story. They say she voiced her fears on her death-bed.’

‘They are lying rumours,’ cried Elizabeth. ‘They are wicked, lying rumours.’

Kat held Elizabeth to her. There was still one thing she had not told her.

She did not say what Elizabeth must soon discover; that in the Court, and throughout the City of London, it was being said that the Lord Admiral had poisoned his wife so that he might be free to marry the Princess Elizabeth.



6

Elizabeth in Danger

In an ante room at the Palace of Hampton Court, Thomas Seymour looked furtively about him. Then suddenly he stooped quickly and, lifting the corner of the carpet, he put some money beneath it.

He was smiling as he straightened up. As soon as he had gone, the young King would enter the ante-room and find

the money. This was their secret hiding-place. Edward was kept short of money by his Treasurer, and he resented it. Thomas said he was right to feel resentful; was he not the King? But he was not to fret because he was poor. He still had his good Uncle Thomas to provide him with what he wanted.

It was a fine thing, thought the Admiral, to be the King's favourite uncle.

Edward was ready to do anything he said, and Thomas felt that it was high time that the Council of Ministers, which ruled the King, was disbanded. Why should not Edward rule in his own right? If he wanted advice he could ask his Uncle Thomas for it!

Thomas had always found it so easy to charm most people that he forgot there were others who were not in the least charmed; they were envious of his good fortune and sought to destroy him. He was now trying to build up a party which would guide the King, and he himself wanted to be head of that party. He thought it would be a good idea if the King and Lady Jane Grey were affianced, and he mentioned this to Lady Jane's father, who of course thought it an excellent plan.

'There might be some to oppose it,' suggested Lady Jane's father.

'Why,' cried Thomas, 'if they did I could raise ten thousand men against them.'

This conversation was overheard and reported to the Council, at the head of which was Thomas's brother, who had been Lord Hertford and was now the Duke of Somerset.

Somerset had always been afraid that his younger and more charming brother would oust him from his position and take it himself.

He believed this was the time to act. He reminded the

Council that his brother, the Admiral, had sought to marry the Princess Elizabeth and, now that he was free, would probably do so again.

It seemed possible that Thomas would seek to put Elizabeth on the throne in place of her brother and oust from her place the Princess Mary, who came before Elizabeth in order of succession.

There was one word for such conduct, said the Council – 'Treason'.

And people who committed treason were arrested and tried.

Kat, who always received the news first, came hurrying into Elizabeth's apartment at Hatfield House.

'My lady, my lady,' she cried. 'This is calamity.'

'Kat, whatever has happened to you?'

'The Admiral has been committed to the Tower.'

'It's impossible!' protested Elizabeth, growing pale. 'On what charge?'

'On a charge of treason!' Kat looked blankly at Elizabeth. 'I heard that one of the charges to be brought against him is that he conspired to set you on the throne.'

Elizabeth did not speak. This could be disaster. This could ruin all her dreams. If the Admiral were found guilty of the charge, there would be many to believe that *she* was not innocent of taking part in it. What would happen to her then?

Almost immediately she reproved herself. Thomas was in great danger and she was thinking of herself. She turned to Kat almost pleadingly. 'He is clever. He will outwit them,' she said. But she was deceiving herself.

Thomas Parry came hurrying in. 'A party is now riding up to the house,' he said. He was shaking with fear. He

was probably remembering all the gossip he had listened to and shared in.

'I will go down and see who it is,' said Elizabeth; and when the men entered the house 'on the King's command' she was waiting to receive them. Her heart sank when she saw that they were soldiers.

One of them carried a scroll and, when he had bowed ceremoniously, he asked her permission to read the King's orders.

Elizabeth listened, dazed, wondering how all this could suddenly happen to disrupt her peaceful world.

She herself was to remain in Hatfield House, and a guard would be placed round the Palace to prevent her disobeying that order. Her governess, Katharine Ashley, and her cofferer, Thomas Parry, were to accompany the soldiers to London, where they were to undergo a cross-examination concerning a matter of treason.

Kat was almost fainting with horror. Thomas Parry was trembling so much that he looked pitiable.

Only Elizabeth remained calm.

She put her arms about Kat and said in a loud voice that all might hear: 'They cannot harm us. We have done no wrong.'

What was happening to Kat? Elizabeth wondered. What was happening to Parry? What questions would be asked them? And what would their answers be? She spent a wakeful night worrying about them, and the next day another visitor arrived at Hatfield House, and demanded at once to be taken to the Princess Elizabeth.

She received him, outwardly cool; but inwardly she was afraid.

He was Sir Robert Tyrwhit, and he had come from the Council to question her.

'What do you hope to discover from me?' asked Elizabeth.

'Whether you are concerned in a plot of treason, Your Grace.'

'You may save yourself the trouble. I am no traitor to the King, who is my beloved brother. He knows this. He has not sent you here.'

Sir Robert looked at her sternly.

'We have questioned your governess and your cofferer. They have confessed all.'

'I do not understand what they could have confessed.'

'My lady, you know full well that Lord Sudley was plotting against the Crown.'

'I know nothing of this — nor do I believe it. Lord Sudley was a good servant to the King.'

'He showed great affection to you and was planning to marry you.'

'I was not aware of his secret plans.'

'What have you to say to these confessions of your servants?'

'That they are false,' she replied. 'No,' she went on passionately. 'You have tricked them. Kat would never be false to me.'

Sir Robert looked at her in exasperation. She was obstinate. He knew he would never be able to wring a confession from her. She would defend herself, the Admiral, and her servants, with that single-mindedness which was characteristic of her. He could not trap her. She was too clever for that.

He said: 'A new governess will shortly be arriving to take the place of Katharine Ashley. She is my wife, Lady Tyrwhit.'

'I do not want a new governess. Katharine Ashley is my governess, and I will have no other.'

'You will take whomsoever the Council sees fit to send you, my lady.'

Elizabeth glowered at him. 'Your wife will soon wish she had never been given this appointment,' she told him. 'And now I wish to retire. I am weary of your questions, Sir Robert Tyrwhit.'

She swept out of the room as though she were already Queen. Sir Robert looked after her with resignation. But when she was in her room she pulled the curtains about her bed and lay there, all her bravado gone.

Thomas was in danger, so were Kat and Parry. And doubtless she herself.

She was a frightened Princess.

Lady Tyrwhit sighed in vain over her new charge. Elizabeth, who had wept all night out of fear for Kat and Thomas, would only glower at her.

'You should try to eat a little, my lady,' murmured Lady Tyrwhit. 'You will be ill if you do not.'

'Doubtless that will please some of you,' snapped Elizabeth. 'If I were ill, perhaps I should die, and then you would not have to plot to be rid of me.'

'Hush, my lady, such words become you not.'

'I have one governess,' retorted Elizabeth. 'That is Mrs Kat Ashley. I swear I will have no other. Nor will I take notice when I am told, Do this—or Do that. If I cannot have my own governess with me, I will do as I wish.'

'You are headstrong, my lady.'

'I am the King's sister, and falsely accused. I would I had the power to punish you as you deserve.'

'Come, come, that is no way to talk.'

'I talk as I please,' Elizabeth retorted.

'Doubtless you do, and it may well be *that* which has brought you to trouble.'

'You are insolent, Madam. You be silent, and so will I.' And Elizabeth turned away; but she was heartbroken.

What are they doing to Kat and Parry? she asked herself. What is happening to Thomas?

Sir Robert Tyrwhit came once more to Hatfield, and there he laid before Elizabeth an account, which was signed by Kat and Parry, and in which the story of the Admiral's proposal of marriage to her was set down. There was also an account of the fun they had all had together under her stepmother's roof. They had told of that occasion when the black velvet dress had been cut to ribbons.

It seemed as though the case of treason was to be proved against the Admiral, and the question was: How far was Elizabeth involved?

She went to her bed and stayed there. She had eaten little for days, and scarcely slept; and this was taking its toll of her.

If only Kat were here! she thought. If only we could comfort each other!

She thought of appealing to the King, but he was powerless in the control of his ministers. It was no use asking her sister Mary to help her. Mary would be watching events closely, and perhaps she would not be displeased to see how matters were turning out for her sister.

In those dark days Elizabeth believed that it might soon be her turn to mount the scaffold and lay her head on the block, as her mother had done.

Was this to be the end of those bright dreams? She remembered all the fun she had had with Kat. She re-

membered once putting a bracelet on her head and pretending it was a crown.

She cried until she was exhausted; and then she slept.

It was foolish to hate Lady Tyrwhit, who was only doing what she believed to be her duty. The new governess looked at her with compassion and implored her to eat. She could not eat, she explained, because the food choked her. It was not that she or her friends were guilty; she was just angry that their enemies had succeeded in accusing them.

'It would be better if you told all you knew,' urged Lady Tyrwhit. 'You are young and the King's sister. You would not be blamed.'

'You want me to concoct some story,' cried Elizabeth. 'Something which will lay the blame on them. You want me to say I was too young to know what they were after. Even if they *had* plotted and led me unwittingly into their plots, I would never betray my friends.'

Lady Tyrwhit tried to soothe her, but she was becoming ill through lack of food and sleep and an excess of anxiety.

It was a blustering March day when Lady Tyrwhit came to her and told her that Thomas had been condemned and would die by the executioner's axe.

She received the news calmly, yet she felt broken-hearted. She remembered the first time she had seen him, when she was a little girl of four, and how from that moment she had always been happy in his company.

They *could* not kill Thomas, who was the merriest, the handsomest man in the world.

They were watching her of course. All the time they were waiting for her to betray herself. She knew that

most girls would have been unable to control their feelings; but she was not like most girls. Always she thought of her destiny. The picture of herself, mounting the throne, was ever present. She believed that she would come to that one day and that it was the most important thing in her life.

If these people guessed her thoughts she might well follow Thomas to the block. She had a feeling that there were many who would be pleased to see her do that.

But she must never forget her destiny.

So she said nothing when they brought this terrible news to her.

Later she said: 'I have had news from Kat. She is in a cold cell. There is no glass in the windows and the bitter wind blows in. Even in the daytime she is in danger of freezing to death. Lady Tyrwhit, I beg of you, plead with them to release Kat from her prison.'

'My lady, you know I can do nothing. You could write to the Protector.'

'Protector Somerset!' cried Elizabeth indignantly. 'He is ready to send his own brother to the scaffold. Do you think he would care for my governess!'

Elizabeth thought it was the darkest day of her life when they brought her the news. Sir Robert Tyrwhit and his wife were there. They were watching her closely. They were spies, she knew. They had received orders: 'See how she takes the news. That might tell us something.'

How she hated them! And how alone she felt!

It seemed to her that day that she, Elizabeth, was standing in the very shadow of the axe.

She must stand before them, her face drained of all emotion. She dared not show how deeply affected she was

by the news they brought her, for they would use her grief to sign her own death warrant.

'Your Grace,' said Sir Robert, 'this day Thomas Seymour, Lord Admiral, Lord Sudley, laid his head upon the block. May God rest his soul.'

Elizabeth's lips would not move. She felt frozen by her grief. But she forced herself to hide her emotion. She forced herself to speak.

'This day,' she said clearly, 'died a man with much wit and very little judgment.'

Then she walked calmly to her own apartments.

Sir Robert looked at his wife.

'She is innocent,' said Lady Tyrwhit. 'He meant nothing to her, and this can only signify that she was unaware of his treasonable plots.'

But the strain of those terrible weeks was too much, even for her to bear.

She grew sick and was forced to keep to her bed. The spring came, but she was no better, and Lady Tyrwhit wrote to the Council, telling them that unless the Princess could be aroused from her melancholy she would die.

In the streets the people talked of the Princess Elizabeth. She was young and attractive. When she rode amongst them she was not cold and aloof like her sister Mary; she did not seem frightened of them, as the King did. She gave them the impression that she was their friend and that she wanted to go on being their friend.

'What is being done to our little Princess?' asked the people.

The members of the Council talked together. 'There might be trouble if the Princess died. It would be said that our treatment of her had driven her to her death.'

'I think I know of one thing which might speed her recovery,' said Somerset. 'And I think we should be wise to see it done.'

It was done; and one day, when Elizabeth lay listless on her bed, the door of her room was thrown open and a familiar figure came running to her bed.

Elizabeth only stared, and then she was sobbing in the arms of Kat Ashley.

'Kat! Is it really you? It's not your ghost. They haven't killed *you* too, Kat?'

Kat laughed, the old mocking laugh. 'I'm no ghost. See, my sweeting. I'm all flesh and blood. Why, how thin you are, my precious. What have they been doing to my Princess?'

'They wouldn't let you come to me.'

'They kept me in that miserable cell.'

'Kat, you are thin and pale, and you're ill.'

'I'm better now, my love.'

'Oh, Kat! I'm better too.'

They lay side by side, holding hands. And after a while Kat said: 'They made me talk — about you.'

'It matters not, Kat. It is all over. You're back. We have lost him — but you are here. We mustn't let them part us again.'

It was not possible to be sad for long with Kat beside her. Before that night was out they were playing the old game.

'As long as I live,' said Kat, 'I shall be nearby to serve Your Majesty.'

Life was full of meaning again. Elizabeth's destiny was shining bright before her.

From that day she began to be well again.



7

A Queen for Nine Days

News of Edward reached Hatfield. His health was not even as good as it had been. He was able to eat very little and had to take sleeping draughts to make him sleep at night. People were saying: 'The King will never live long enough to marry and give the country an heir.'

Elizabeth wrote to him, telling him how she missed him, and his answer was to request that she have a picture painted of herself to send to him.

This Elizabeth was delighted to do.

'It is not enough to have a picture,' Edward wrote. 'I want to see you. You must come to Court, Elizabeth.'

'So,' declared Elizabeth to Kat Ashley, 'we are to go to Court.'

Kat shook her head sagely. 'Much as I'd like to go, my lady, I confess to certain alarm.'

'Why, Kat?'

'The King is ailing.' Kat put her lips close to Elizabeth's ear. 'There's some that say he can't last long. And then there's Mary—who herself is not too healthy, and then—'

'And then, Kat, is it not advisable that I should be at the centre of these happenings?'

'Tom Seymour sought to drag you to the centre; and you saw what that meant!'

Elizabeth was silent. She had seen, and she agreed that there were times when it was wise to stay in the background and watch great events—particularly when, so you believed, you were destined to play a great part in them.

But the King had invited her to Court, and so to Court she went.

On a bright March day she entered London, and this time she came as a Princess, the favourite sister of the King. She brought with her a retinue of two hundred, and the people lined the streets to watch her progress.

They were delighted with her, for, although she was not exactly beautiful, she was very fresh and charming with her bright colouring; and she knew how to please the people. Everyone who called out a greeting to her received a smile. Elizabeth did not want one of these people—whom she looked on as her future subjects—to think for a moment that she would ever be haughty with them. She had long made up her mind that the first duty of a Queen was her subjects' wellbeing. The cheers and approval of the people made her happy as few things could.

Thus she came to St James's Palace.

Edward received her with the greatest joy but it was impossible for them to talk intimately together until after all the ceremonies were over. Then he asked her to come to his apartments, where they could be together as they used to be in the old days before he was King.

Lady Jane was with him, and her eyes were swollen with weeping. Edward was trying to comfort her, but poor Edward himself was so ill that he himself looked to be in need of comfort.

Beside those two Elizabeth seemed almost startlingly robust.

'What ail, Jane?' she asked.

'You may well ask,' said Edward. 'Poor Jane! I would I could do something to help her. Tell her, Jane.'

Jane said: 'I am to be married against my wishes.'

'Then you should refuse the match!' cried Elizabeth.

'We do not all possess your spirit,' said Edward.

'Or your luck,' put in Jane. 'I have been made a prisoner. I have been beaten. I can see that there will be no peace for me until I give way. So, I have agreed.'

'Who is your husband to be?' asked Elizabeth.

'Lord Guildford Dudley.'

'Why, that's Robert's brother. I remember I first met him in Edward's apartments.'

'It's true,' said Edward. He had taken Jane's hand, and was smiling wanly at her. 'I was to have been Jane's husband,' he said wistfully.

'We planned it,' said Jane, 'in the old days. When we were children.'

'If I were less sick—' began Edward.

'Perhaps you will get better,' suggested Elizabeth.

But Edward only smiled; and all three of them knew that this could not be so.

Very soon Edward retired to his bed. He was growing so weak now that he could not sit up for long at a time without trying his strength.

Elizabeth, who had always thought Jane Grey too meek, now felt a great pity for her. She took her into an ante-room while the King was being prepared for his bed and, drawing her to a window seat, whispered: 'Why, Jane, Guildford is not so bad. He is not as strong and forceful as his brother Robert, and if you are firm you will be able to manage him, I am sure.'

Jane covered her face with her hands. 'Oh, Elizabeth,' she explained, 'it is not my marriage with Guildford which causes me this anxiety. I like him well enough. It is his father and my father. They are so ambitious for us.'

'I know that his father, now Earl of Warwick, is one of the most powerful men in the country,' began Elizabeth.

'It is true,' said Jane. 'He and Somerset seem to rule together. And they say that in Warwick's view there is no room at Court for Somerset, and in Somerset's view no room for Warwick. I am afraid that my father-in-law-to-be will try to set me on the throne.'

'You! But what of Mary—what of—?'

'He will say that you and Mary are not the *legitimate* heirs because your father repudiated your mothers. Whereas there is no doubt of my descent.'

Elizabeth felt cold with anger. Yet when she looked at the pale, anguished face of Jane Grey she was sorry for her. If ever a girl would have a crown which she did not want put on her head that girl was Lady Jane Grey.

Elizabeth then remembered Kat's words. The Court was full of intrigue, and it was a dangerous place to be in if one wanted to keep one's head on one's shoulders.

After a short stay at Court, Elizabeth returned to Hatfield. She was wise enough now to realize that it was safer to watch events from a distance.

And events were moving fast at Court.

The dispute between the Protector Somerset and the Earl of Warwick was won by Warwick, and news reached Hatfield that the Duke of Somerset, who had not hesitated to send his brother, Thomas Seymour, to the block, had now followed him there.

Warwick, now indeed the most powerful man in the country, made himself the Duke of Northumberland; and Elizabeth, who knew his intentions regarding Lady Jane Grey and his son Guildford, waited in trepidation for what would happen next.

She and Kat discussed this state of affairs.

'Kat, what is going to happen when Edward dies? It is no use our pretending that my poor little brother will live much longer.'

'We know that this wicked Northumberland is going to put Jane Grey on the throne.'

'It cannot be, Kat. Mary will never stand by and allow that to happen.'

'It would seem as though this country may well be plunged into civil war.'

'I think of poor Jane,' said Elizabeth. 'She asks nothing but to be left alone.'

'Poor child!' said Kat. 'I pity her.'

Several weeks passed, and all the news brought to them from Court was of the King's declining health.

It was July, and Kat, who was ever on the watch, saw a rider galloping towards the Palace.

She guessed what the news was and, as usual, wanted to be first to hear it, so she left the Palace and waylaid the courier in the courtyard.

'What news?' she asked. 'How fares the King?'

The man looked at her. He said: 'I am riding ahead of a party sent to Hatfield on the instructions of the Duke of Northumberland.'

'The King is worse?'

The man did not give a direct answer, but something in his manner told Kat the truth. All he said was: 'The King's health is not good.'

'Take your horse to the stables; you will be looked after. I will see that all is made ready in the Palace to receive the party.'

With that she left him and ran to Elizabeth's apartment.

'My lady, my lady,' she cried; and Elizabeth looked up from the book she was reading.

'What has happened, Kat?'

'A rider has just arrived. He has come on ahead. Messengers from Northumberland are on the way. To bed at once, my lady. It is your safest place.'

Elizabeth did not need to be told why. She and Kat had discussed such a possibility a hundred times.

If Edward died, and Northumberland wanted to put Jane Grey on the throne, he would try to seize the persons of Mary and Elizabeth, for he was fully aware that if the people did not want Jane as their Queen – and many would not – they would rally to the side of one or other of the Princesses.

Elizabeth must not on any account be drawn into an intrigue, neither by those who would support her nor those who would seek to imprison and perhaps kill her.

Elizabeth knew full well that a Queen could only rule by the wish of the people and, if Edward were dead, it was not she who was rightful Queen of England, but her sister Mary.

Therefore, although she longed for the crown, she would

not take it unless it was the will of the people that she should do so.

The dangers through which she had passed had taught her caution and wisdom.

So she hastily got into bed and, when Northumberland's men arrived to escort her to London, she feigned such sickness that they saw it was impossible for her to leave her bed.

Elizabeth stayed in bed until the messengers from Northumberland had left Hatfield. Kat, watching their departure from the window, said: 'There's trouble brewing. Northumberland thinks he has put his son Guildford on the throne through his marriage to the Lady Jane. But I think he has reckoned without the people.'

'It is never wise to reckon without the people,' said Elizabeth. 'Oh, Kat, I wonder what will happen next.'

'If this plot succeeds,' said Kat, 'if the people accept Lady Jane as their Queen, they will accept her children as heirs to the throne, and that will be the end of our plans.'

'This will not be the end of our plans,' Elizabeth said firmly. 'If my brother is dead, the true Queen of England at this moment is my sister Mary. The people will not forget that.'

Elizabeth was right. The people did not forget, and at that moment were rallying to the side of Mary.

Northumberland had kept Edward's death a secret while he sent his messages to Elizabeth and Mary commanding them to come to Court in Edward's name. Mary began the journey, but she was warned half-way and realized that, if and when she arrived at Court, Northumberland would make her his prisoner while he proclaimed Lady Jane Queen of England.

Mary therefore went to Kenninghall, a mansion situated

in Norfolk, and Elizabeth awaited the outcome of the conflict from the safety of her apartments at Hatfield House.

Kat, ever alert for news, brought her some now and then; and they discussed the future which was momentous for Elizabeth.

‘During those days Elizabeth thought often of Robert Dudley, who had impressed her almost as strongly as Thomas Seymour had. He would be fighting on the side of his father for the cause of Lady Jane Grey and his brother Guildford.

‘He is the sort of person,’ she told Kat, ‘who, I feel, would always get what he wants from life.’

‘Then let us hope that he does not do so this time,’ said Kat grimly. ‘For if England is to have Queen Jane, it would seem that she will not have Queen Elizabeth. The best thing that could happen for us is that Mary should take the throne.’

‘And her children be heirs!’ cried Elizabeth.

‘Nay, my Princess, Mary will never have children. If Mary is Queen, then her half-sister, the Princess Elizabeth, will be her successor.’

During the next days the battles between the factions waged furiously; and each day it became more and more clear that the people would not have Jane, but considered Mary their true Queen.

Jane reigned only nine days; and at the end of that time Mary was proclaimed Queen of England.

Northumberland lost his head on Tower Hill, and his son, Robert Dudley, was made the Queen’s prisoner and taken to the Beauchamp Tower.



Elizabeth was standing in her apartment, the letter in her hand.

It was signed by her sister Mary, reigning Queen of England. Elizabeth was to meet her at Wanstead on July 30th, and they were to enter London together.

'This time,' said Elizabeth, 'I must not feign illness.'

'No, my Princess,' agreed Kat, 'but it will be necessary for you to show the greatest caution.'

Elizabeth knew this was true but, as she rode out from Hatfield her spirits were high. She was one step nearer the throne. She was now going to be seen in procession by the people, and they would all look upon her as the heir to the throne. That was her position, until Mary had a child. 'That cannot happen,' said Elizabeth to herself. 'That must not happen.'

Elizabeth was dressed in white for the meeting with the Queen, and she wore her red hair dressed simply, not crimped nor curled as was the fashion. She looked beautiful in her glowing health, and the people cheered her.

She accepted their cheers modestly and gratefully. The smiles she bestowed were without the faintest trace of haughtiness. She did not forget for one moment the importance of pleasing the people.

At Wanstead she waited for the coming of Mary.

How old she looks! thought Elizabeth. It was true—there was a great contrast between the woman in purple velvet and jewels, and the young girl simply dressed in white.

Mary embraced her warmly, and the people's cheers delighted Elizabeth; they meant that while Mary was accepted as the Queen, she, Elizabeth, was accepted as the Queen's heir.

'I trust you are recovered from your illness,' said Mary; and there was something in her tone which suggested that she did not entirely believe in that illness.

'I am fully recovered, Your Majesty. The news of your victory brought me such pleasure that I am sure it helped in my recovery.'

'Dangers may still lie ahead,' answered the Queen. 'But I have good friends.'

'You have none so ready to serve you as your sister,' Elizabeth told her.

'I rejoice to hear that,' Mary replied.

Into London, side by side, rode these two daughters of Henry VIII. There was pageantry in the streets. From the windows gaily coloured banners fluttered, and parties of children sang the Queen's praises as they passed along. The river was chock-a-block with craft of all descriptions, and from some of the barges came the sounds of sweet music. London was welcoming the Queen and her sister.

Past the Minories to the Tower of London they went. The Lord Mayor greeted the Queen, and with him was the Earl of Arundel carrying the Sword of State.

Elizabeth felt exultant; she was certain that her turn would come. But now they had reached the church of St Peter ad Vincula, and Elizabeth was suddenly sobered; for, before the church, on that patch of green, her mother had laid her head on the block for the executioner. How short a step it was, thought Elizabeth, from earthly glory to death. That was something she must always remember.

Then she suddenly thought once more of that bold and handsome Robert Dudley who, but a short while ago, had believed the way to greatness lay open to him and his brother, the husband of Queen Jane. He was a miserable prisoner now behind the weather-beaten walls of the Beauchamp Tower.

I must be ever watchful, pondered Elizabeth. Still more, now that I am so close to the throne, than I ever was before.



8

Elizabeth, the Prisoner

It was not long before Elizabeth became aware of the acute peril in which she stood. Bishop Gardiner, who was always at the Queen's elbow, had made himself the enemy of Elizabeth. Elizabeth was a Protestant, and one of the dearest wishes of Queen Mary was to bring Catholicism back to England. In this Bishop Gardiner supported the Queen, and he pointed out to her that such a young and attractive Protestant heir to the throne was a constant menace to their plans.

Elizabeth was urged to attend Mass, which she bravely refused to do. The Queen was angry, but at first she was inclined to be lenient. She had been such a short time on the throne, and she did not want to appear harsh. Simon Renard, the Spanish ambassador, who hoped to arrange a marriage between Mary and Philip of Spain, was continually urging the Queen either to make Elizabeth accept the Catholic religion or destroy her.

There was great rivalry between Simon Renard and the French Ambassador, Antoine de Noailles, so that anyone who was the enemy of Renard was looked upon with friendship by Noailles.

Noailles' task in England was to seek to make trouble for Mary, since Mary was the ally of Spain; he therefore sought out Elizabeth.

One day he came upon her walking in the grounds of the Palace and said: 'Your Grace's position at Court is an unhappy one; some regard you as heir to the throne, yet are you treated as such? Your Grace is in danger. My master, the King of France, would be ready to offer you his help, if you should ask it.'

'I know well the goodness of the King of France,' murmured Elizabeth warily.

Noailles put his head close to Elizabeth's. 'He would do all in his power to help Your Grace. You have only to ask.'

Elizabeth looked pensive, as though she were considering this offer, then she hurried away to tell Kat what had happened.

'I'm frightened,' said Kat.

'I believe,' Elizabeth replied, 'that the King of France wishes to involve me in a plot which would end in my losing my head.'

'Why should he be so heartless?'

'Because my cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, is married to

his son, and if Mary died and I died – she could be Queen of England. He would like to see both Mary and myself removed to make way for her.’

Kat looked at her young mistress in panic.

‘You are too young to be submitted to this danger,’ she said. ‘You should be far away from the Court until the storms have blown over.’

Elizabeth agreed, for she knew that what Kat said was true.

The Queen sent for her young sister, and when Elizabeth had knelt before her and lifted her eyes to Mary’s face she saw that the latter was cold with disapproval.

‘I have sent for you,’ said Mary, ‘because I have heard that concerning you which does not please me.’

Elizabeth lifted a penitent face. ‘I pray Your Majesty to tell me in what way I have displeased you, and I will endeavour to earn your approval.’

‘It is this matter of religion. Why do you shut your mind to the truth?’

Elizabeth’s heart sank. Why, she wondered, do people always call what *they* believe ‘the truth’? She herself favoured the Reformed Faith, but she did not want to force others to believe as she did. She believed in freedom in religion. If ever she were Queen, she thought, she would do all in her power to give her people that freedom.

She knew the extent of her danger as she looked into her sister’s face and saw there the fanaticism of a bigot.

Elizabeth dared not turn Catholic. She knew that there were a great many Protestants in the country who looked upon her as their leader. She could not therefore renounce Protestantism. If ever she came to the throne she would have a Protestant England, but she hoped she would not be harsh with Catholics.

Yet here was her sister, almost threatening her if she did not turn to that doctrine which Mary believed to be the right one.

Elizabeth's clever brain came to her assistance. 'I am ignorant, Your Majesty. At Court I find little time to study the books which would be useful to me.'

Mary's cold voice was like the lash of a whip as she rapped out: 'You shall not leave Court. You shall stay here, where I may be aware of your actions.'

Those words were the most terrifying Elizabeth had yet heard.

She knew she was under strong suspicion, and, in fact, a prisoner.

It was the last day of September when the Queen's coronation took place. The city was gay, for the people loved pageants and this promised to be one of the most colourful they had seen for a long time.

Mary left the Tower of London, where she had stayed the night before; for it was a custom that all monarchs on their way to their coronation should be lodged in the Palace of the Tower, which adjoined the great prison.

About her rode seventy ladies, all dressed in crimson velvet. All the ambassadors and gentlemen of the Court were present, and the Lord Mayor carried the sceptre.

Mary herself was seated in a magnificent litter which was supported by six white horses covered with cloth of silver. Mary's dress was blue velvet, trimmed with ermine; and on her head was a net of gold, set with pearls and precious stones.

Behind rode Elizabeth in her own chariot. This chariot was covered in red velvet, and the Princess's dress was of cloth of silver. Next to Elizabeth sat Anne of Cleves.

It was a glorious pageant; and in Fenchurch Street four

giants barred the Queen's passage while they chanted her praises. A triumphal arch had been set up over Gracechurch Street and on this was perched a tall man, dressed to represent an angel, who blew a trumpet as the Queen passed by. In Cheapside and Cornhill the conduits ran with rich, red wine.

There was indeed rejoicing in the streets of London.

When Kat helped Elizabeth to undress that night, she whispered to her: 'You looked radiant. Poor Mary; she was so wan. Not all the velvet and jewels could alter that.'

'Kat,' whispered Elizabeth, 'did you hear the people talk of me?'

'I saw their eyes as they watched you, my Princess. I know that, when some of them shouted for Mary, they were longing to shout for Elizabeth.'

Elizabeth's eyes shone. Then she said quickly: 'If any one of them had done so, I do not think my head would have remained long on my shoulders.'

'Hush you! Don't give me such talk,' said Kat quickly.

But she knew that the Princess was right.

There was talk throughout the Court. This concerned the Queen's marriage, for now that she was Queen, Mary must marry. There was one very handsome young man whom the Queen favoured. This was Edward Courtenay whose grandmother had been a daughter of King Edward IV. He was a distant cousin of Mary and Elizabeth because their grandmother, Elizabeth of York—who had married Henry VII—was a sister of Courtenay's grandmother.

Because of his father's nearness to the throne, Henry VIII had long ago had his head off, but his son Edward, who had been but a boy at the time, had been kept in the Tower

ever since. Mary had released him and, since he was royal and so handsome, there were rumours that she would marry him.

Edward Courtenay had, moreover, cast his eyes on Elizabeth, and it did occur to him that he would rather marry her than Mary.

Noailles, the French ambassador, sought out Elizabeth to conspire with her.

'Has Your Grace heard that there is a plot afoot to marry the Queen to Spain?'

'I hear many rumours,' said Elizabeth evasively.

'The people of this country would never tolerate such a match,' insisted Noailles.

'The Queen rules this country,' retorted Elizabeth. 'She will marry when and whom she pleases.'

'And risk the anger of the people! The Queen is no fool. She realizes whom Edward Courtenay prefers to marry.'

Elizabeth flushed bright pink and Noailles went on: 'Ah, I see you understand my meaning.' He came a little closer. 'If you married Courtenay, I dare swear the people of England would rather see you on the throne than your sister and a Spanish bridegroom. Courtenay has powerful friends in the west country. They would rally to your cause.'

'It would seem, sir,' retorted Elizabeth, 'that you speak to me of treason.'

She hurried away, her heart beating fast. She was in the greatest peril. One false step now and it would be the Tower for her, by way of the Traitor's Gate, and then—the block.

She went at once to the Queen and knelt before her.

'Your Majesty,' she said, 'I am sick. I need the country air. I beg of you, give me leave to retire to Hatfield or Ashridge.'

'You look very healthy to me,' replied the Queen. 'You will stay here until I have discovered what plans you are making for your future.'

Filled with apprehension, Elizabeth left the Queen's presence.

Elizabeth received aid from an unexpected quarter in an unexpected manner. Simon Renard accused the French ambassador of forming a plot to set the Princess Elizabeth on the throne.

As nothing could be proved against either of them, Elizabeth was able to express the indignation she felt, and asked for an audience with the Queen, which was granted.

Mary was sorry that she had misjudged her sister, for she had realized how foolish was the charge which had been brought against her, and she understood full well that it was merely another little trick of the Spanish ambassador—to have Noailles exiled to Fiance and Elizabeth destroyed.

Bigoted as she was, Mary's sense of justice was strong. When Elizabeth knelt she bade her rise and embraced her.

'You have been misjudged, sister,' she said. 'I am sorry for this.' She took a row of pearls from her neck and placed them about Elizabeth's. 'Here is a peace offering,' she said. 'Now let us be friends.'

Elizabeth gratefully accepted the pearls and told her sister that she would always treasure them. But, shrewd as she was, she was fully aware that she had been lucky to escape. She knew that there was only one way in which she could elude her enemies and eventually reach the throne. That was by escaping from Court. She knew that if she was ever going to persuade Mary to grant her request, she must ask now while her sister was in this tolerant mood.

So she said earnestly: 'My health is not good, Your Majesty. I need the country air. I should greatly welcome the peace of the country, that I might study those doctrines on which you set such store. I feel that, if I had the leisure to study, I might be able to please you by accepting these views.'

Mary said: 'You may leave the Court when you wish.'

Elizabeth, Kat and their retinue wasted no time in setting out for Ashridge.

So for a while Elizabeth lived at Ashridge, but not in peace. There were continual plans afoot to marry her to some foreign Prince, but Elizabeth stood out firmly against this, for she knew that, if she ever left the country, all hope of becoming its Queen would be lost.

She heard that the Queen had decided to marry Philip of Spain, who might attempt to set up the Inquisition on English soil, and that there was murmuring throughout the country because of this.

And then one day came news which deeply shocked her.

Sir Thomas Wyatt had risen in rebellion, and was threatening to storm the city of London. The Queen bravely gathered her forces and prepared to stand out against the rebels. News came to Ashridge that the Queen's forces had defeated those of Wyatt, and that the latter and Edward Courtenay were the Queen's prisoners in the Tower of London.

This was a time of the greatest danger, for it was whispered that there was one other conspirator who was deeply concerned in the Wyatt rebellion, and that the purpose of the rising was to set that person on the throne. That other conspirator was said to be Elizabeth.

'But I am innocent,' cried Elizabeth aghast, as Kat put her trembling arms about her.

'My love,' cried Kat, 'there is only one thing we can do. We must go to bed. You are sick—too sick to travel—too sick to receive visitors.'

Thus, when messengers came from the Queen to summon Elizabeth to Court, they found her in bed suffering, Kat told them, from a grievous malady which made it impossible for her to leave that bed.

But the Queen was not to be deterred. Very soon two other messengers arrived. These were the Queen's physicians, Dr Wendy and Dr Owen.

'The Princess is too ill to receive visitors,' Kat told them.

'She cannot be too ill to receive physicians,' Dr Wendy retorted and, without more ado, he and Dr Owen made their way to the Princess's bedchamber.

They stood by her bed, looking down at her.

'We come on the Queen's command,' said Dr Wendy. 'You are to leave Ashridge tomorrow with the coming of the dawn.'

'I am too ill to leave my bed,' answered Elizabeth.

'Alas,' replied Dr Wendy, 'these are the Queen's orders. We shall give you one day to rest while we treat your sickness. And then we are certain that you will be well enough to leave on the following day.'

Elizabeth understood. Her ruse had failed.

Kat was by Elizabeth's bed at dawn and Kat's eyes were wide with horror.

'There is nothing we can do but obey,' said Elizabeth. 'Come, help me to prepare myself.'

'You are to travel in a litter,' Kat told her.

'That is small consolation.'

When Elizabeth was carried out from Ashridge she felt that she was already a prisoner.

As they passed through the country, people came out of their cottages to see her and to smile their sympathy. They had all heard about the rising of Sir Thomas Wyatt, and they knew it was because Elizabeth was believed to be implicated in the plot that she was going to London.

Their sympathy shone in their faces.

'Good luck to the Lady Elizabeth,' shouted one woman. 'May you live and prosper, and not suffer that which has befallen that other poor lady.'

Elizabeth smiled her thanks, even at such a time remembering to be grateful for the good wishes of the people.

'To what lady does she refer?' Elizabeth enquired of Dr Wendy.

'Your Grace,' answered the doctor, 'Lady Jane Grey and her husband, Lord Guildford Dudley, have paid the price demanded for their treachery.'

'Jane!' gasped Elizabeth. And she pictured fragile Jane, with the bandage about her eyes as she laid her head upon the block. Not poor little Jane! she thought, though she dared not say it.

Then a terrible sadness came over her and she forgot her fears for herself.

Into London they came, past London Bridge, on which the heads of those who had taken part in the rebellion had been stuck up on poles as a grim warning to any who felt inclined to join in other rebellions.

And thus Elizabeth came to the Palace of Whitehall.

Bishop Gardiner came to Elizabeth's apartments in the Palace on that Friday before Palm Sunday and, when Elizabeth looked at him, her heart sank in despair because she knew this man to be one of her greatest enemies.

He came straight to the point. 'The charge against Your Grace,' he said, 'is that you are concerned in the Wyatt plot.'

'That is false!' cried Elizabeth in ringing tones.

Gardiner lifted his shoulders. 'We think otherwise, and you must prepare to leave the Palace for the Tower.'

'I must see the Queen at once.'

'The Queen does not wish to see you, and her orders are that you are to be taken to the Tower.'

Elizabeth knew that it was useless to plead with this man. Her expression was calm, but she was thinking: This is what happened to my mother. She was taken to the Tower, and she never left it.

Queen Mary was alarmed. She had seen the affection of the people for her sister, and Bishop Gardiner had whispered to her that, if the people knew that the Princess Elizabeth was being taken to the Tower, they might make some attempt to rescue her.

'It would be unwise to take her on her journey by night,' said Gardiner, 'for then it would be easy for her supporters to attempt a rescue.'

'If you take her by day,' answered the Queen, 'they will line the banks of the river to watch her barge go by, and there may be angry scenes.'

'Let us take her on Sunday morning,' suggested the Bishop. 'It is Palm Sunday, and many of the people will be at church. We will have her in the Tower before they are aware of it.'

The Queen approved of this idea and so, on the morning of that Palm Sunday, Elizabeth was told to make herself ready for her journey.

'Is this the Queen's pleasure?' asked the Princess.

'It is, Your Grace,' answered the Earl of Sussex, who had been commanded to accompany her and did not like his task at all.

'The Lord's will be done,' murmured Elizabeth. 'I am contented, seeing it is the Queen's pleasure.'

And so the barge carried her to the Tower of London. It had started to rain, and Elizabeth held up her face, wondering when she would feel the rain once more.

They brought her to the dismal Traitor's Gate.

'You cannot make me land at this spot,' she cried. Then she saw that the tide was too high for her to do so without wetting her shoes. She pointed this out to her captors. 'Mayhap it is a sign,' she told them.

The Earl of Sussex looked at her sadly, and she gave him one of her dazzling smiles, for she knew that at heart he was her friend.

'Allow me to offer you my cloak,' he begged. 'It will protect you from this rain.'

'It is not from the rain that I need protection, my lord,' she answered pointedly, and then she stepped out of the boat into the water, which came higher than her ankles.

She stood for a moment looking at the grim building before her, and then she said: 'Here lands as true a subject, being prisoner, as ever landed at these stairs. Before Thee, O God, I speak it, having no other friend but Thee alone.'

Several of the officials of the Tower, and their families, had come to watch the arrival of this august prisoner.

One of the officials called out to her: 'God preserve Your Grace.'

She smiled sweetly. 'I have some friends then,' she declared.

There were three little children who had pushed to the front of the watching group. They were studying the Princess with wide eyes.

The eldest of the children, a little boy about five years old, called out spontaneously, echoing his elders: 'God preserve Your Grace.'

'God bless you,' said Elizabeth. 'Tell me, who are you?'

The elder boy said: 'My father is the keeper of the Queen's robes. This is Will, the warder's son and this is Susannah.'

Elizabeth smiled at the boys and the youngest child—the little Susannah—who could not have been more than three years old.

'Susannah will pray for you too,' the younger boy told her.

'You make me very happy,' said the Princess with tears in her eyes.

'Your Grace,' murmured the Earl of Sussex, 'it grieves me, but you must pass on.'

'I understand, my friend,' answered Elizabeth. 'I pray you lead the way.'

And so she passed on to her dismal lodging in the Bell Tower; and a deep despair filled her heart, for she was so near that spot where her mother had spent her last hours on Earth.

She thought: I will send to France for a sword. I will not die by the axe. My mother was a Queen of England and sent to Calais for a sword because, although she knew she must die, she would not do so by the axe.

She heard the jangling of keys as the door was locked; she leaned against the cold walls of her cell and thought of Thomas Seymour, who had faced this, even as she was facing it now. She thought of poor, gay Catharine Howard, who had suffered a like fate.

'And now, it is my turn,' she whispered.

Then suddenly she remembered a dark-eyed boy with whom she had danced in her brother's apartments.

Somewhere in this prison he too languished, expecting any hour to be summoned to the green, where the axe would be waiting for him.

It was impossible to imagine Robert Dudley going to his death. He was too full of life.

And what of Elizabeth herself?

Suddenly she felt triumphant. Robert Dudley will not die here, she thought. Nor shall Elizabeth.

What comfort it was to think of Robert, quite close to her, probably thinking of her now—for he would surely have heard the news that she was under arrest—even as she was thinking of him.



9

The Princess in the Tower

Elizabeth was right when she thought that Robert Dudley would be thinking of her. He was lying in his cell in the Beauchamp Tower, constantly expecting to be taken out to his execution. He knew that his brother Guildford, with his wife Lady Jane, had died at the executioner's hand, yet Robert could not believe that fate was for him.

He had grown more handsome, and even prison life could not alter that. He charmed the warders; because

Robert knew very well how to charm people. The warder's little boy accompanied his father when he took Robert his food and Robert and he were soon fast friends.

'He will come with me when I visit your cell, my lord,' explained the warder.

'That gives me pleasure,' answered Robert.

'He saw the Princess arrive, didn't you, Will?' said the warder.

Will nodded and Robert was alert.

'This little one,' went on the warder, fondling his son's head, 'is already a friend of hers.'

'It is sad to be a prisoner,' mused Robert. 'I confess I long to feel grass under my feet and smell the flowers.'

The very next day, when little Will came with his father, he was carrying a bunch of flowers. It was a simple little bunch, consisting of primroses and violets.

'I picked them,' said Will. 'For you, my lord.'

Robert swung the little boy up in his arms. 'It is the pleasantest thing that has happened to me since I entered this place,' declared Robert. 'But I need a bowl of water for the flowers.'

The warder said: 'I will bring you one on my next round.'

'That's no good,' said Robert. 'The flowers will be dead by then. Go and bring me a bowl now. Leave my friend Will with me. He'll not mind being locked in a cell with me, will you?'

The little boy was delighted to be locked in a cell with his adored friend; and at length the warder agreed to get a bowl of water.

When they were alone together, Robert knelt down and whispered: 'Listen, Will. I want you to do something for me. Bring me more flowers tomorrow.'

Will nodded.

'I shall take these from the bowl and give them to you.'

'But I gave them to you,' protested the boy.

'Yes, but I want you to take them to the Princess for me. But you must not tell anyone. Tell your father that you gave me a present of flowers and I gave you one. Do not let anyone know that you are taking a present from me to the Princess.'

The boy looked puzzled.

'It is a secret, Will, our secret. There will be a letter in the flowers I give you. You must be careful not to drop it.'

The boy nodded, his eyes shining with excitement.

'It is a secret between you and me, Will—and the Princess.

Little Will followed his father into the Princess's cell. He was carrying a bunch of flowers.

'He insists on coming with me, Your Grace,' said the warder.

'I am glad he does,' answered Elizabeth. 'And he has brought me flowers. Oh, little Will, that pleases me.'

She knelt, put her arms about the boy and kissed him, while his father thought what a kind and simple lady the Princess Elizabeth was.

Will whispered: 'Letter, Princess.'

And Elizabeth felt a wild exultation. She looked at the flowers which had been pressed into her hands; she buried her face in their fragrance, and was aware of the note hidden among them.

She could scarcely wait for the warder and little Will to leave her.

She found the note among the flowers.

It told her that Robert Dudley was close to her, a prisoner like herself, and that he longed to see her. He never forgot her for one moment. He deplored the evil

fate which had brought her to the Tower, and he was ready to die in her service.

Elizabeth read and re-read that letter.

She wanted to dance round her cell. She wondered how she and Robert Dudley could plot together to escape from this prison.

The officials of the Tower were determined that they would not be harsh to their royal prisoner. A little turn of fortune, they reminded themselves, and she would be their Queen. Moreover they could not help but be impressed by her dignity and her determination to please them all.

She had grown weak for lack of fresh air, and it was decided that she should walk along the narrow passage between the Bell and the Beauchamp Towers. But even though she never went out unless she was accompanied by her guards, the fresh air did help to revive her.

It was noticed how fond she was of the children. They all clustered about her – Martin, the son of the Keeper of the Queen's Robes, Susannah, and little Will, who was constantly bringing her bouquets of flowers.

Then she began to recover her health and very soon she was allowed the freedom of the Tower gardens, although of course she was never allowed out of doors without a strong guard.

She had discovered from the children that Robert Dudley was in one of the lower dungeons of the Beauchamp Tower, and she decided to try to speak with him.

It was a sunny day when she wandered out, trying to make it appear that her steps led her motivelessly in the direction of the Beauchamp Tower.

'I pray you,' she said to her guards, 'let me be alone for a while.'

'We dare not let Your Grace out of our sight,' they said.

'Then keep me in sight, but let me walk alone.'

They looked at each other, and one of them nodded to the others.

'Providing we do not lose sight of Your Grace.'

'If you do, follow me with all speed.'

Elizabeth went on alone and wandered aimlessly—or so it seemed—in the direction of the Beauchamp Tower. She sat down and leaned against the grey walls.

Her guards relaxed. She was merely resting. She was not going to attempt an escape.

She turned her head slightly and said through the iron bars at a window: 'Robert! Robert Dudley!'

The children had not been wrong. This was his cell. 'Princess!' he whispered and, oddly enough, although she was a prisoner and he was a prisoner and they were both in the utmost danger, she had rarely been so happy.

'I am being watched,' she said. 'My guards have given me this small liberty on condition that I do not go out of sight. I am now within their view.'

'You have received my notes?'

'Good little Will! He is a fine messenger,' she answered.

'What can I do to help you?'

'Stay where you are and await my return. I am going to walk on now. They grow suspicious. But I will turn back and sit here again by your window. If it is safe I will speak to you.'

'My Princess—'

She walked away, still allowing the guards to keep her in sight; and after a while she came back to the barred window.

'Robert Dudley?'

'Your Grace.'

'I was sorry when I heard you had been arrested for treason.'

'It makes me happy that my misfortunes so affected you.'

Elizabeth said sharply: 'I was grieved that you acted treasonably towards the Queen.'

'I served my father,' said Robert. 'I was too young to do anything else. I was his to command, as now I am the Princess Elizabeth's.'

'You are a fool, Robert Dudley,' said Elizabeth. But she could not hide the fact that she was delighted by his words.

'Perhaps, Your Grace. But I have one wish, and that is to serve the Lady Elizabeth.'

'And what of the Queen?'

'One day Elizabeth shall be my Queen,' was the answer.

'No doubt then you would serve *her*! But what will you do for Elizabeth the prisoner?'

'All that she commands.'

'Robert, could we—escape from this place?'

'Only by a miracle.'

'Do you believe in miracles?'

'Today I do, because I am talking to the Princess Elizabeth.'

'Through bars!' she snorted.

'There will not always be bars. We must see that there are not always bars.'

'Hush,' she said. 'They are coming towards me. I shall rise and go to meet them. I shall do my best to speak to you again.'

Elizabeth, smiling serenely, walked to meet her guards.

The exciting game went on. Always she pleaded for a little privacy, and always it was granted. Always her steps took her in one direction, and she often paused to rest by the barred window in the Beauchamp Tower. Did her

guards suspect? They knew who was incarcerated behind those grim, grey walls. Yet, so little pleasure had she, that they could not deny her a little conversation with one who had been a friend.

They believed that any day the summons might come for one of those two—or both—to leave their cells; they believed they might well be taken to Tower Green with the executioner, the blade of whose axe would be turned towards them.

It was not easy to make an escape. And if they did escape, where could they go? Could they leave the country? Perhaps. But Elizabeth did not want to leave the country. Some instinct told her that her destiny lay in her own country. She declared she would die of a broken heart if she had to leave England.

They talked of what they would do when they were free. Daringly they played the old game of make-believe which Elizabeth had played with Kat.

‘When you are Queen, your first servant will be Robert Dudley,’ he told her.

‘I will make you Master of my Horse,’ she told him. ‘That will mean that you are in constant attendance.’

It was a pleasant dream, but never had it seemed farther from fulfilment.

There came a day when little Susannah found a bunch of keys somewhere in the grounds.

Susannah had often heard people talk of keys. She knew that prison doors were unlocked by these, and she was too young to know that only the right key opened any door.

What if she took the keys to the Lady Princess? Then she could open the door of her cell and that of Lord Robert, and they could be free.

So Susannah ran to the Princess one day, holding this bunch of keys.

'Lady, lady!' she cried. 'Here are the keys. These will make you no more a prisoner.'

Elizabeth took the keys and looked at them.

'But, Susannah,' she said, 'I do not think these are the keys to my cell.'

One of the guards came to her.

'Your Grace,' he said, 'I must ask you to give me those keys.'

'Certainly,' said Elizabeth. 'Little Susannah found them. She brought them to me.'

The guard said: 'I shall have to report this. It may be considered a very important matter.'

'But you have seen what has happened—' began Elizabeth.

'I must report that the child has brought these keys to you.'

With that he left them and little Susannah, sensing that something had gone wrong, burst into tears.

In a Court room at the Tower, the officials sat round a table.

'So the child carried keys to the Princess,' said the Captain.

'Sir,' answered one of the warders, 'they were not the keys to any cell in the Bell Tower.'

'But they were keys. The Princess is allowed to roam the precincts of the Tower. What if she passed keys on to prisoners? This is a serious matter. Has any other suspicious occurrence been noted?'

'I have seen young Will take flowers to her.'

'Flowers! Anything could be hidden in a bunch of flowers. Have Will brought to us.'

Little Will entered the court room in some trepidation.

He knew that something serious was afoot, and he knew too that it concerned the Princess and Lord Robert. Why should they want to see little Will? Only because he was concerned in the matter, and he guessed it had something to do with the flowers he had taken from Lord Robert to the Princess. He must remember that on no account must he say anything about the notes in the bouquets. That was very important. Lord Robert had said so, and because Lord Robert was his friend, he would do anything rather than betray him, although he must not of course tell a lie.

The fierce captain began to question him. 'Did you take flowers to the Princess?'

'Yes, sir.

'Where did you get the flowers?'

'From our garden.'

'Now listen to me, Will. Did anyone give you something to put in those flowers?'

'No, sir.' That was true. Will had not put the notes in the flowers. Lord Robert had done that himself.

'H'm!' said the Captain. Then he had Will's father called in.

'Your son accompanies you on your rounds?' he asked.

'Yes, sir,' said Will's father.

'And is it your duty to visit any of those cell's where prisoners concerned in the Wyatt rebellion are kept?'

'No, sir.'

'Take your son and wait outside for a few moments,' said the Captain, and Will's father took Will and obeyed the Captain's order.

When they were alone the Captain said to the company: 'I think there has been no harm done as yet. The keys Susannah found had merely been carelessly dropped by one of the warders. It was an innocent, childish gesture to take them to the Princess. If there had been some plot

afoot it would not have been done within sight of the guards. As for the flowers, that also was a childish action. The Princess is fond of children and they of her. But there shall be no more flowers or gifts from anyone for the Princess. And little Will shall not accompany his father into the cells.'

Will and his father were called in and told what had been arranged.

Will was upset. What would the Princess think of him? When he next saw her walking in the precincts with her guards he ran towards her, but the guards would not let him come near.

'I can bring you no more flowers, Mistress,' he called. Then he turned quickly and ran away, because he had begun to cry.

Queen Mary was ill and Gardiner thought this was a good time to rid himself of the Princess Elizabeth; so he wrote a death warrant and sent it to the Tower. The death warrant, if it were legal, should have been signed by the Queen, and the Lieutenant of the Tower noticed this.

He knew that by refusing to accept it he would incur the displeasure of the powerful Gardiner, but he was an honest man. Therefore he wrote to Gardiner, telling him that he could not act on the warrant as it lacked the Queen's signature.

Gardiner, very angry, wrote back to say that while the Queen was ill he himself signed important documents.

The Lieutenant still hesitated. This was a more than usually important document, he said, and he was loth to act without special instructions from the Queen.

Fortunately for Elizabeth, Mary recovered from her illness and discovered what was happening. She did not

blame Gardiner, because she knew he was a staunch Catholic and her ardent supporter, but Mary was capable of soft feelings and she remembered that Elizabeth was her sister.

'If I allow her to stay in the Tower,' she said to herself, 'she might be hurried to death, as could have happened had I not recovered when I did.'

Mary was eager not to have the death of her sister on her conscience; she did not wish to send her to her death unless she had a good excuse for doing so; and as yet nothing had been proved against her.

She called one of her most trusted servants to her. This was Sir Henry Bedingfeld, a knight of Norfolk.

'I wish you to perform a very important task, my lord,' she told him.

'I am at Your Majesty's service,' replied Sir Henry.

'I wish you to take the Princess Elizabeth to Woodstock and guard her there as you would the most dangerous prisoner.'

Sir Henry bowed his head. He did not greatly care for the task allotted to him, but he must obey the Queen's command.

Elizabeth was brought from the Tower to the Palace of Richmond. There Mary received her coldly.

'You are strongly suspected of treason,' she told Elizabeth.

'I am not guilty,' answered the Princess.

'Many have spoken against you.'

'Your Majesty is wise enough to know that information given under torture is worthless.'

'I am not sure of your loyalty.'

'I will prove I am not guilty. I can do so.'

The Queen shook her head impatiently. 'I have a husband for you. It is Philibert, Duke of Savoy.'

Elizabeth was aghast. Expecting death, she had been offered a Duke. But to marry a foreigner would mean leaving England, and to leave England would mean the end of her hopes.

'I would not agree to the match,' she said, her tawny head held higher than usual.

'What right have you to refuse the husband I choose for you?' Mary demanded.

'I feel that the married state is not for me.'

'I have not noticed any unfriendliness in you towards the opposite sex. I think you are being frivolous.'

'Your Majesty, I am very serious,' Elizabeth answered earnestly. 'I would rather die than marry the Duke of Savoy.'

'*You* should not talk recklessly of death.'

Mary signified that the interview was over.

It was the next day when Elizabeth, in the charge of Sir Henry Bedingfeld, set out for Woodstock. The people greeted her along the route, and some of them brought out little cakes they had made for her. She thanked them and blessed them, and they cried out that they wished her well.

That made her happy. Her spirits could always be uplifted by the friendliness of the people.

But when she reached the Palace of Woodstock, she was not allowed to use the royal apartments, but was taken to the gatehouse.

She was so weary that she went straight to bed; but before she fell asleep the bed curtains parted and, opening her eyes, she gave a cry of delight. Then she was laughing in the arms of Kat Ashley.

'At last we're together again,' cried Kat.

'You were in prison, too.'

'Yes, but they let me out and when I heard you were coming here, I came too. But never mind what's past. It's the future that matters. And every passing day, every passing hour, brings my Princess nearer to the throne.'



IO

Queen of England

Captivity at Woodstock was not too unpleasant. Sir Henry Bedingfeld was not a harsh man and he had fallen slightly under the spell of the Princess Elizabeth.

Elizabeth herself was far from the dangers of the Court; she had her dear Kat with her. They assured each other continually that it was merely a matter of waiting.

The Queen had married Philip of Spain and, although there was a time when Mary thought they would have an heir, this event did not take place.

England was not a happy country. The persecution of the Protestants had begun and many people were burned to death at Smithfield in London and in squares and market places all over the country.

'This is not the way,' cried Elizabeth to Kat. 'There should be freedom of opinion if England is to be merry.'

'One day England will be merry,' Kat told her. 'That will be the day when Elizabeth is its Queen.'

And so they waited.

Now and then there would be items of news smuggled into Woodstock. Lord Robert had been freed from the Tower.

It was a day of great rejoicing when Elizabeth heard that. She hugged Kat fiercely and said: 'There is little that could have made me happier than that. Lord Robert is free. One day he will be my very good servant.'

'Do not think too highly of this man merely because he has a handsome face,' warned Kat. 'Remember Seymour.'

'And you, remember to whom you speak!' retorted Elizabeth regally, so that Kat made a deep curtsy and craved 'Her Majesty's' pardon. Then they were laughing and playing the old game again.

Yes, they were not unhappy days, although always hanging over the Princess's head was the threat of imprisonment and death.

Mary was inclined to be lenient with her sister. The poor Queen was very unhappy at this time. Her subjects hated her; they blamed her for the Smithfield fires and the suffering they saw around them; they did not like her Spanish husband; and Mary herself was ill and growing more infirm every day.

She allowed Elizabeth to be removed from Woodstock to Hatfield House, and even visited her there. Several suitors appeared on the scene, asking for Elizabeth's hand, but Elizabeth managed to refuse them all on some pretext or other. There were other plots which, it was said, had been made to put Elizabeth on the throne in place of Mary. The Princess, though at times in the utmost peril, still managed to preserve her life.

How could she, virtually a prisoner, plot with the Queen's enemies? she demanded.

And so good a case did she bring forward that no one could accuse her successfully.

She had scratched on a pane of glass in her room at Woodstock:

*Much suspected – of me
Nothing proved can be,
Quoth Elizabeth, prisoner.*

And so the time passed.

One day there was a visitor at Hatfield House. Kat came bursting into Elizabeth's apartments in a state of such excitement that she could scarcely speak.

'Now, Kat, what is it?' demanded Elizabeth.

'You won't be so calm when you hear, my lady,' replied Kat. 'It's Robert Dudley.'

'Robert!' cried Elizabeth in great delight. 'What does he want?'

'To see the Princess Elizabeth of course. He will disclose his business to no other.'

'And I should think not!' retorted Elizabeth. 'Kat, bring me a mirror. How do I look?'

'You'll look well enough in his eyes, I doubt not,' laughed Kat.

Elizabeth received Robert with great dignity. He fell to

his knees and, when he had taken her hand and kissed it, still kneeling, he raised his eyes to her face.

'I rejoice to see you, Lord Robert,' said Elizabeth. 'It is rarely that I have visitors.'

'It may be that visitors do not come because they fear by so doing to place Your Highness in danger.'

'And perhaps themselves,' replied Elizabeth. 'But I know that you have been doing your country good service in the wars, so I will not say you stayed away for that reason.'

'Yet I have stayed away from your side until now because I feared that my presence might have put you in danger. For your safety is of more account to me than my own.'

'Tell me the purpose of your visit,' said Elizabeth.

'I have brought you these,' he said; and he laid two heavy bags at her feet.

'What do these contain?' she asked.

'Gold,' he told her. 'This is but a token. Should you need more money, I have it and it is at your service. Your Grace—' He whispered, as Kat had done: 'Your Majesty—if Mary should die there might not be peace in this realm. There might be some who wish to withhold the throne from the true successor. If that should be the case, you must know that there is one who would serve you with his gold—and with his life. That man is Robert Dudley.'

Elizabeth's smile was full of tenderness.

'I thank you—Robert,' she said.

Then he took her hand and kissed it again.

'When you are Queen of England,' he told her fervently, 'I shall be the first to kneel before you and offer myself as your servant.'

When Robert had left them, Elizabeth said to Kat:

'Kat, I believe this is one of the happiest days I have so far known.'

As Queen Mary grew more and more sick, more people began to call at Hatfield House. One of those who came was the Count of Feria, ambassador from his master, Philip of Spain.

He bowed most deferentially over Elizabeth's hand, and he had courtly manners. Foreign manners! thought Elizabeth. She did not like them. Give her good English manners. Give her good English men like Robert Dudley!

'I come to assure Your Grace of my master's friendship,' he told Elizabeth.

She felt exultant. He would only offer this assurance if he were almost certain that she would soon be Queen of England.

'My master has great influence with the Queen, his wife,' Feria went on: 'It is his wish that Queen Mary shall name you her successor. He has great influence with the Queen, and your future depends largely upon him.'

Into Elizabeth's expression there crept a haughtiness. 'Your master is my good friend,' she said. 'But I cannot see that he—or anyone—can give me what is mine by right of inheritance. Nor could I, with justice, be deprived of it.'

'Is it not the custom in England that a monarch names his or her successor?'

'In England, my lord, the succession goes to the next of kin.'

'I know that full well. But there are certain differences of opinion, I have always heard, regarding the marriage of your father and mother.'

'None who sees me doubts I am my father's daughter.'

'You speak truth, and it is the Queen's pleasure, I under-

stand, and the wish of my master, His Most Catholic Majesty, to name you her successor. He will continue your friend on certain conditions.'

'Conditions?' demanded Elizabeth sharply.

'You will be expected to discharge Her Majesty's debts.'

'I should consider that my duty.'

'And that you will not change her counsellors.'

'I should choose my own counsellors, my lord, as she did hers.'

The Count raised his eyebrows, but he continued: 'The Queen would not wish you to succeed her unless you agreed not to change the religion of this country.'

Elizabeth's gaze was shrewd. She was thinking of the Smithfield fires and England's superficial return to Roman Catholicism, which had come about since Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain.

She said enigmatically: 'I would not change my country's religion, providing only that it could be proved by the word of God, which shall be the foundation of my religion.'

The Count of Feria felt bewildered. He did not understand this young woman, who seemed quite frivolous at one moment and made such shrewd answers at others.

He knew though that there was nothing he could do. She was the accepted heir and the people of England were weary of the misery Mary's reign had brought.

Elizabeth called to her one of the men of her household whom she knew she could trust. This was Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, who had been imprisoned at the time of the Wyatt rebellion but freed because there was not enough evidence against him. Elizabeth knew him to be one of her staunchest supporters.

'Go with all speed to St James's Palace, where the Queen, they say, lies dying,' she said. 'I know that many of the Queen's servants are my friends. I wish to know when she dies, as soon as possible. It is imperative that this news is not kept from me. The Queen wears on her finger a Spanish ring which was given to her by her husband Philip. She would never allow this ring to be taken from her finger; only if I received it should I know she was dead. When you send that ring to me I shall know that I am Queen of England.'

Sir Nicholas set out with all speed.

Elizabeth was eagerly awaiting the news. She could trust Sir Nicholas Throckmorton. But it was too early yet. He would not have had time to reach London.

A rider came galloping to Hatfield House. Elizabeth heard him demanding admittance, and the sound of his voice set her heart beating with excitement.

They could not keep him from her. He was forcing his way to her apartment, and she laughed inwardly, for she liked his arrogance, which had always matched her own.

He fell on his knees when he saw her and cried: 'God save Your Majesty! God save Queen Elizabeth!'

'Rise,' she commanded. 'Why do you come thus, Robert Dudley?'

'Because, Your Majesty, I swore that I would be the first to give my allegiance to my Queen.'

Elizabeth whispered: 'It is so then?' But she knew it was.

She turned away from Robert Dudley and, overcome by the great task which lay before her, she knelt and quoted: 'This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes.'

She was praying for courage and strength.

At length she rose and said: 'Robert Dudley, you are my friend. You shall never regret this day.'

'Your Majesty,' he answered, 'I hear the sounds of arrival. Such news could not be long kept a secret.'

'But you were the first—my Master of Horse.'

He took her hand and kissed it. Then she withdrew it, for others were coming in to pay homage to the Queen.

It was a November day when Queen Elizabeth set out for London. All along the route people came out of their houses to cheer her.

'The reign of terror is over,' they said. 'There will be no more smoke from the fires which destroyed our martyrs. Young Elizabeth is our Queen.'

Into the City of London she came, and beside her rode her Master of Horse.

The brightly coloured banners fluttered a welcome; there was music in the air; the guns boomed and the bells rang out.

As Elizabeth rode along, as she listened to the loud and confident cheers of her people, she swore to serve them well. Her dearest wish had been granted: to be Queen of England. And immediately another great desire seized her: to do her duty to those who now gave her such a rousing welcome.

The most impressive moment of the journey was when she entered the precincts of the Tower, and the Lieutenant fell on his knees before her in homage and welcome to his Queen.

Then she spoke, and those about her were deeply moved by what she said.

'Some,' she said in her loud, clear voice, 'have fallen from being princes of this land to be prisoners in this

place: I am raised from being a prisoner in this place to being a prince of this land. That dejection was a work of God's justice; this advancement is a work of His mercy. I must bear myself to God thankful for the one, and to men merciful for the other.'

There was a deep silence as she stopped speaking. Then it seemed as though a brightness filled the misty November air. This bright young girl, with her dedicated air, would bring peace and prosperity to their country; under her rule England would be merry again.

Someone cried: 'God save the Queen!' And all about her took up the cry. The sound of happy voices echoed about the grey walls of the Tower. 'God save Elizabeth! God bless our Queen!'

Among the books which have been helpful to me while writing this book are :

J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth* 1.

Milton Waldman, *Queen Elizabeth* (Brief Lives).

Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*.

Elizabeth Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great*.

L. F. Salzman, *England in Tudor Times*.

Marjorie and C. H. B. Quennell, *A History of Everyday Things in England 1500-1799*.

William Hickman Smith Aubrey, *The National and Domestic History of England*

J. A. Froude, *History of England*.

John Wade, *British History*.